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New York

President:	Mr. Rycroft	(United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland)
Members:	Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Mr. Llorentty Solíz
	China	Mr. Wu Haitao
	Egypt	Mr. Aboulatta
	Ethiopia	Mr. Alemu
	France	Mr. Lamek
	Italy	Mr. Lambertini
	Japan	Mr. Bessho
	Kazakhstan	Mr. Umarov
	Russian Federation	Mr. Safronkov
	Senegal	Mr. Seck
	Sweden	Mr. Skau
	Ukraine	Mr. Yelchenko
	United States of America	Ms. Sison
	Uruguay	Mr. Rosselli

Agenda

The situation in Afghanistan

Report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security (S/2017/189)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Tribute to the memory of the victims of terrorism in Afghanistan

The President: We begin this meeting on Afghanistan with a tragic reminder of the ultimate price that too many have paid to help build the future of their country. I would like to ask that the Council observe a minute of silence in memory of all recent victims of terrorism in Afghanistan, including the victims of the attack on Kabul military hospital on Wednesday, which claimed more than 50 lives and left many more wounded.

The members of the Security Council observed a minute of silence.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in Afghanistan

Report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security (S/2017/189)

The President: In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representatives of Afghanistan, Australia, Belgium, Canada, Germany, India, the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Netherlands, Pakistan, Spain and Turkey to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the following briefers to participate in this meeting: Mr. Tadamichi Yamamoto, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan; and Ms. Sima Samar, Chair of the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite His Excellency Mr. João Pedro Vale de Almeida, Head of the Delegation of the European Union to the United Nations, to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2017/189, which contains the report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security.

I now give the floor to Mr. Yamamoto.

Mr. Yamamoto: The National Unity Government is almost halfway through its five-year term. We have seen some of the fruits of its efforts, and yet much remains to be done. Fortunately, the ground is being prepared to make Afghanistan a success. Internationally, Warsaw and Brussels set the stage for steady progress. Domestically, the National Unity Government has introduced programmes to improve social services and promote growth and development. Now is the time for action to deliver concrete outcomes that will improve Afghan lives today and for the future.

A major challenge is at hand. The Government has to pursue both an inclusive peace process and economic growth against the backdrop of an intensifying insurgency and worsening security. As the Afghan Government redoubles its efforts to tackle these challenges, strong international backing — political and financial — is required for the work ahead. Allow me to highlight three areas where the Afghan Government has made visible steps forward. These areas include anti-corruption, the electoral process and women's economic empowerment.

First, the Government is making a break with the past by taking new steps to address corruption. The Anti-Corruption Justice Centre is now prosecuting cases. In parallel, the Government has taken steps to address corruption through a range of institutional reforms, such as efforts to restore integrity to the management of public services. We need, however, to acknowledge that much remains to be done, including addressing corruption in the security institutions. That will require political leadership and strong determination. I have the pleasure to inform the Council that the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) will launch its first anti-corruption report, entitled "Afghanistan's other battlefield: The fight against corruption", very soon. The report highlights the Government's achievements in addressing corruption and recommends options for further progress.

Secondly, the Government has committed at the highest levels to hold parliamentary elections that are seen as fair, inclusive and transparent by the Afghan people. The commissioners of the Independent Election Commission and the Independent Electoral Complaints

Commission are appointed. It is encouraging to see them making preparations for elections and pushing the electoral reform agenda forward. However, rebuilding trust in the electoral process will be challenging. I am hopeful that all stakeholders will invest in an inclusive process and build the broad political support necessary for improved elections.

Thirdly, just two days ago, on International Women's Day, the Government launched the Women's Economic Empowerment National Priority Programme. The plan recognizes women as key economic actors whose contributions to Afghanistan's future are essential. While this is an important step forward, Afghanistan remains one of the most difficult places in the world to be a woman. For many women, the story is one of discrimination, poverty and oppression. If that story is to change, women must be allowed full participation and leadership and be respected as decision-makers at all levels. This will require the strong support of the Afghan Government, civil society and international partners.

Let me elaborate on the issues of development and economic growth. It is imperative that growth strategies start to deliver concrete results. In part due to the worsening security situation over the past two years, service delivery has become increasingly difficult. We have witnessed some downward trends in key indicators, such as access to health clinics and education facilities. Nine million people, or close to one-third of the population, live below the poverty line, and given population growth, per capita gross domestic product is expected to go down. We need to act now to reverse this course.

The commitments made in Brussels, as well as the Afghan National Peace and Development Framework and the Citizen's Charter provide an essential opportunity for progress in that regard. This is, however, neither an easy nor a simple process. The efforts of the Afghan Government will require the continuing, well-coordinated support of international partners. More focused action on governance, social services and private sector development to promote equitable growth will be necessary. We must work hand in hand to make a discernible change in the lives of all Afghans so that they feel the upwards lift of economic and social progress.

Developing a nation while fighting an insurgency is an uphill struggle. Improving the security environment is essential to realizing economic growth and delivering on the ambitious plans which that country's citizens deserve. The deteriorating security situation remains of great concern. Armed clashes continued unabated in early 2017, despite the cold winter months. I am gravely concerned about reports pointing to an intense spring fighting season. Everything should be done to improve security. We must also remain vigilant about the presence of foreign fighters, including Da'esh.

Last year, UNAMA recorded the worst number of civilian casualties since we began keeping records nearly a decade ago. The horrific attack two days ago is testimony to the heavy price Afghans pay. This trend must be reversed. While parties to the conflict have expressed commitments to protecting civilians, concrete efforts must be made to ensure that such statements translate into real protection for Afghan civilians and reduce casualties. I look forward to the formal adoption and implementation of the national policy on civilian casualty prevention and mitigation by the Government of Afghanistan. Civilian casualties are preventable. I also encourage the Government to follow through on steps taken to break the culture of impunity and to make it clear that nobody is above the law.

Deteriorating security also led to the highest-ever level of internal displacement in 2016. More than 650,000 Afghans were displaced; returns from Pakistan exceeded 620,000 people. Displacements and returns for 2017 are likely to remain at these levels. These trends demand a major humanitarian response in the short term. The Government has shown strong leadership in developing plans for the long-term integration of the displaced and returnees, but sustained international assistance is essential.

There clearly can be no military solution in Afghanistan. It must be acknowledged that a prolonged conflict will lead only to further misery for the Afghan people and undermine the very foundations for economic growth and development.

Since my last briefing (see S/PV.7844), I have travelled the region extensively to discuss how neighbouring countries can support or play a proactive role in peace efforts. I have been encouraged. I sense that countries in the neighbourhood are more ready to work towards bringing peace to Afghanistan. They recognize the importance of establishing an environment conducive to peace and regional stability. For these reasons, I urge the countries concerned,

particularly in the neighbourhood, to support the Afghan Government's interest in an intensified regional peace effort. UNAMA is working closely with the Afghan Government for that purpose. In that regard, I am deeply troubled by the heightened tensions between Afghanistan and Pakistan, and call for the reduction of tensions through dialogue.

The future of Afghanistan has to be built through an Afghan-owned and Afghan-led process for all Afghans. The path of peace must be pursued through negotiations and not through violence. The Taliban should enter peace talks without preconditions. I call on all relevant actors to exercise their influence to that end. The Government, neighbouring countries and other key Powers should reinforce the message that the Taliban can be a part of Afghanistan's future and its political and social fabric.

Afghanistan's future must be placed above all considerations. An endless conflict and violence are simply not acceptable. We all need to make peace our new and absolute imperative. In close consultation with the Afghan Government, UNAMA stands ready to move the process forward and to help generate momentum for peace. Afghanistan's most important battle ahead is that for a lasting peace. UNAMA looks forward to the adoption of the renewed mandate by the Council. We wish to reassure you, Sir, of our commitment to the ever-more effective discharge of our mandate for the benefit of the people of Afghanistan.

The President: I thank Mr. Yamamoto for his briefing.

I now give the floor to Ms. Samar.

Ms. Samar: I am very much delighted to brief the Security Council on Afghanistan. I would like to thank you, Sir, and Security Council members for their support to my country, Afghanistan, and the mandate of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA). I hope that the mandate of UNAMA will be extended and expanded by the Council, and should also like to stress that the full and strengthened presence of the United Nations and the international community is vital for peace, stability, security and the protection of human rights in Afghanistan. I would like to thank UNAMA for its presence and its work in support of our people, institutions, security and peace.

I am pleased to say that Afghanistan has transformed in many ways. The achievements and progress of the country have been immense and beyond my capacity to describe in this meeting in the allotted time. Nonetheless, we should celebrate our progress and transformation and acknowledge the bravery, shared responsibility and sacrifices we have made through the course of our progress.

One of the areas that I want to highlight is that of my responsibility as Chair of the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission, human rights and women's rights in Afghanistan. We all remember — colleagues who have been supporting Afghanistan remember — that 16 years ago the Taliban ruled Afghanistan. They ruled the country with violence, extrajudicial killings, threats and intimidation and barbaric execution of people. They ruled by denying the Afghan people's rights, freedom and dignity, and they were proud of violating women's rights — lashing women in public and closing schools and offices to women. Women were not even allowed to go shopping without male members of their family. The Taliban still do the same to the people who live under their rule and influence. But in most of the country we have transformed that situation, where freedom, human rights and equality for women and men are constitutionally guaranteed. Afghanistan's Constitution established an Independent Human Rights Commission to monitor, promote and protect human rights, and obligated the State to observe human rights and international treaties Afghanistan has signed and become a party to. The country acceded to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, and signed onto the International Criminal Court (ICC), in addition to five other main international human rights instruments.

With a strong and modern Constitution, we have also achieved a real and meaningful review of our laws, have adopted new laws in support of human rights and have put in place policies and programmes that promote and protect human rights in the country. The following are examples of the progress we have made on human rights, and also challenges and threats that we face in the country. I spoke of progress and challenges, and I would now like to elaborate further.

On women's rights, we celebrated 8 March in Afghanistan by issuing a report on violence against women. We have noted that progress has been made on addressing violence against women, which includes the approval and implementation of the law on the elimination of violence against women and numerous policies, including the national action plan on women

and peace and security. The report also acknowledges that the Government has taken concrete steps in giving women an opportunity to apply for high office, and the number of women in key Cabinet and Government positions has increased. Women are striving for equality, justice, recognition and meaningful participation in Government, and they have had some success.

However, I am sad to say that, despite all the progress we have made, women are not yet treated equally. Women are victims of violence, and that remains a very sad story of our time. Violence against women is committed at home and in society, and by terrorist groups in very barbaric ways. Many women have been killed, stoned or mutilated by the Taliban — among the horrible incidents that women hear of and fear every day. On the other hand, the lack of a strong rule-of-law system, harmful traditions, corruption and a continuing culture of impunity continue to be factors that contribute to violence against women.

Access to education has been the most important progress in Afghanistan. More than 8 million children are now enrolled in schools, and more than 30 per cent of them are girls. Education is key to a prosperous and strong Afghanistan. However, war and threats from terrorist groups remain a real barrier to the expansion and improvement of access to education. They continue to close girls' schools and do not allow modern education for boys. Terrorist groups attacking cities and villages deprive our children of access to education.

Four decades of war and conflict have destroyed the foundation of justice, the rule of law and good governance. We still have a weak judiciary and rule-of-law institutions, while the concept of good governance is a new phenomenon in the country. Support for justice, the rule of law and good governance is a key issue for the United Nations to focus on. Supporting the Government to ensure justice and the rule of law by respecting the independence of the judiciary and fighting corruptions is a key for a democratic Afghanistan.

Democracy and democratic space for everyone must be preserved and enhanced. Elections and electoral processes have always been chaotic in our country. As an early-warning system and for preventing any disputes, it is important that UNAMA play its role to assist and support the electoral system. We would like to see the Government of Afghanistan and the international community support and ensure transparent, free and fair elections. The new Independent Election Commission needs support, and the Government must prevent any interference in the electoral process in order to build the confidence of the public in democratic processes.

The security and safety of Afghans is a prerequisite for everything in Afghanistan. I am sad to announce here that we — both the international community and Afghans — have not been able to secure Afghanistan. The lack of security in Afghanistan results in huge displacement, refugees and increased poverty. Roads and villages are not safe, and people are taken hostage and killed. We hope that the international community will continue to contribute to our security. The presence of the United Nations and the international security forces is needed as a gesture of the world's commitment to our security.

Civil society and human rights and women's rights defenders play an important role in Afghanistan. They try to hold the Government accountable and champion the protection of the rights and dignity of Afghans. Threats and intimidation against them are increasing. We are happy to say that we have developed a national action plan on protecting human rights defenders in Afghanistan. I would like to urge the Security Council to consider adopting a draft resolution on the importance of civil society and human rights defenders and their protection.

Economic development is key to a better, free and democratic Afghanistan. The country has the potential to be a prosperous country. However, currently over 40 per cent of Afghans live below the poverty line, and more than 60 per cent are extremely poor and face food insecurity. We hope that the international community and the Afghan Government will continue their investment in trade and the economy. The Council could consider calling on our neighbouring country to open its borders to economic transactions, and not limit trade for political purposes. Unfortunately, the closure of the border by Pakistan has had an immense effect on the people and on humanitarian needs. UNAMA could ease tensions in the region and support Afghanistan in dealing with its regional issues.

The people of Afghanistan need and deserve to live in peace. While we welcome any meaningful steps towards achieving peace, we must note that the standard of not talking to terrorists must be the same everywhere in the world. If Da'esh and other terrorist groups are not to be negotiated with, then why are some countries talking to the Taliban? The Taliban are terrorists, and

we should deal with them in the same way as we do Da'esh and other terrorist groups. In the meantime, the lack of accountability and respect for justice and human rights in the peace process is a failure; it does not lead to sustainable peace and security. We are disappointed with the Security Council's decision to take the name of Gulbuddin Hekmatyar from the sanctions list, as well as the blanket amnesty that the Government of Afghanistan provided to him and his commanders. We believe they have committed crimes and violated human rights in the past four decades. Despite the adoption of a national action plan on resolution 1325 (2000), our country is lagging behind in implementation and in significantly including women in peace and security processes. UNAMA should support an inclusive peace process, with emphasis on accountability and justice for victims of human rights violations.

Attacks against the Hazara community is a tragic fact in Afghanistan. That ethnic group has been targeted systematically by both Da'esh and the Taliban. The Government of Afghanistan must do more to protect this ethnic group against the immediate threat of Da'esh and the Taliban, and bring to justice those who commit crimes against them.

Afghanistan is not a safe place for returnees. I would like to emphasize that the world community must pay attention to the need and the plight of Afghans who seek refuge worldwide. Forcibly deporting and discriminating against refugees based on their origin is not in conformity with the international law.

Transitional justice is a very important factor in ending impunity and promoting a culture of accountability. The four periods of war requires an established framework to deal with war crimes and crimes against humanity. I strongly urge the Council to expand the mandate of UNAMA to include transitional justice, and also to facilitate the intervention of the ICC in Afghanistan.

I come from Kabul, the capital. The city was attacked last week, and again this week. Many people died. The recent attacks in front of the Parliament buildings, the Supreme Court, a police station and, two days ago, on a hospital are inhuman acts and show that terrorism and the supporters of terrorism in the region continue to kill innocent people and have no regard for any values or norms, let alone international laws and basic human rights. Last year alone, over 11,000 people were killed or injured in Afghanistan, most of them by armed opposition to the Government. The continuation of terrorism and conflict has placed Afghanistan in danger. The danger to the very existence of the country, its democratic system, human rights, freedom and economy is immense and immanent. That causes frustration and disappointment and inflicts pain on the Afghan people on a daily basis.

International law and the Constitution require Afghanistan to honour its obligation to respect, protect and honour human rights. The country must combat the human rights violations that occur daily and are committed by influential people, and also fight meaningfully and effectively against torture and the inhumane and degrading treatment of people. It must bring to justice all officials who violate human rights.

Good governance and strong institutions serving to enforce the law and fight against corruption are key to promote, protect and achieve human rights in Afghanistan. I would like to call on the international community to coordinate and cooperate with the Afghan government in that regard. Establishing parallel structures for short-term quick fixes, which undermine the actual responsibility of formal institutions, will not solve the problem. We all know that human rights, development and peace and security are interconnected and require stable, strong, transparent and accountable institutions, with inclusive citizen participation.

Finally, I reiterate that the protection and promotion of human rights are a shared responsibility, and the people of Afghanistan need the Council's continued support. In that context, Afghanistan is a candidate for the Human Rights Council for the period 2018-2020. I look forward to the full support for our candidacy by Member States. I call upon the international community and the United Nations to support the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission to independently continue its job to monitor, protect and promote human rights. The people of Afghanistan deserve to live in full dignity.

The President: I thank Ms. Samar for her briefing. I now give the floor to the representative of Afghanistan.

Mr. Saikal (Afghanistan): Let me congratulate the United Kingdom on its leadership of the Security Council this month. I thank the Secretary-General, António Guterres, for presenting his first report (S/2017/189) on the situation in Afghanistan. Allow me to also thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Ambassador Tadamichi Yamamoto, and the Chair of

the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission, Ms. Sima Samar, for their respective briefings.

Given the severity of the situation in my country, I would like to devote my statement today to the challenging security situation, hidden agendas, the peace process and the ever-increasing necessity for regional and global cooperation.

In recent months, dozens of terrorist attacks across Afghanistan have claimed scores of innocent lives. In January, three simultaneous terrorist attacks in Kabul, Kandahar and Helmand provinces killed or maimed more than 160 people, including six United Arab Emirates diplomats. In February, the Supreme Court, our symbol of justice, was attacked, thereby causing numerous fatalities. Last week, two separate attacks in the heart of Kabul killed many civilians. Finally, just two days ago, Afghanistan's largest hospital was attacked, leaving more than 140 killed or wounded, many of whom were doctors, nurses or patients. The Taliban has claimed responsibility for most of those attacks, but regardless of whose names are labelled upon them, our own investigations have clearly established that they were generally plotted beyond our borders and on the other side of the Durand Line.

That is the fundamental factor that needs to be addressed. The Security Council promptly issued a press statement (SC/12743) condemning those attacks in the strongest terms, for which we are thankful. The statement underlined,

> "the need to bring perpetrators, organizers, financiers and sponsors of these reprehensible acts of terrorism to justice".

It also urged

> "all States, in accordance with their obligations under international law and relevant Security Council resolutions, to cooperate actively with the Afghan authorities in this regard."

That is indeed what Afghanistan has been asking for over the course of many years. My Government and my people would like to know why, after countless terrorist atrocities and specific Security Council statements condemning them, we are still witness to impunity for the perpetrators and orchestrators of endless violence.

Let me be very clear: the conflict in our country is not homegrown, as some desperately and deceptively try to portray it. On the contrary, it is the nexus of illicit narcotics, violent extremism and State sponsorship of terrorism, with their regional dimensions and global consequences. Tragically, it has morphed into an undeclared war by a neighbouring State that has for many years continued to coordinate, facilitate and orchestrate violence through proxy forces and more than 20 terrorist networks. Those groups benefit from a full-fledged external infrastructure to keep Afghanistan off-balance, for motives that are inconsistent with our desire to live in a peaceful and prosperous region.

In earlier statements to the Council, we have emphasized, time and again, Pakistani actions that sustain terrorist activities in our country. Today, let me quote the leading Pakistani officials themselves. General Pervez Musharraf, who led Pakistan for eight years as President, proudly commented in a 2015 interview with *The Guardian* newspaper that

> "Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence had given birth to the Taliban to counter Indian action against Pakistan".

Last year, Mr. Sartaj Aziz, the Prime Minister's Adviser on Foreign Affairs, went on record to say that Taliban leaders reside in Pakistan and that they have influence over them. A couple of weeks ago, Mr. Ashraf Jehangir Qazi, former Ambassador of Pakistan to the United States, Russia, China and India and Special Representative of the Secretary-General to Iraq and Sudan, wrote in *The Herald* magazine of Pakistan,

> "[a]fter the Soviet defeat and withdrawal, we (wittingly or unwittingly) unleashed a ruinous civil war and imposed a barbaric and medieval Taliban upon the hapless Afghan people".

His words only confirm the truth that "Pakistan talks one policy, but walks the other".

In a 2013 article in *The New York Times*, Mr. Husain Haqqani, another former Ambassador of Pakistan to the United States and Sri Lanka, categorized in clear terms the ongoing links between Pakistan's State apparatus and the Taliban and mentioned in the context of peace talks that

> "the Taliban and their Pakistani mentors have hardly changed their arguments or their tendency to fudge facts".

The quotes and admissions that I just read out were not rhetoric from Kabul or emblematic of a blame game,

as is often claimed by a known Member State. That was Pakistan talking.

Against that backdrop, in February, a series of unfortunate terrorist attacks in Pakistan killed dozens and wounded many more innocent men, women and children. As has always been the case, Afghans always share the pain and anguish of their Pakistani brothers and sisters. However, the Government of Pakistan, immediately and without any regard for any investigative process or clear facts, blamed Afghanistan for the attacks and resorted to increased breaches of its territorial integrity, closing main border crossings, blockading trade and transit and harassing our nationals travelling to, or living in, their country. Such measures constitute a clear violation of the principles of the World Trade Organization and the rights of land-locked countries, including their access to the sea.

From January until today, we have recorded at least 59 instances of violations of Afghan territory by Pakistan's military forces, including three violations of our airspace, over 1,375 cross-frontier artillery shellings which caused dozens of casualties, the displacement of 450 families in the middle of a cold winter in our eastern provinces, the burning of our forests, illegal construction of infrastructure near the frontier region, and hostile maneuvering of tanks and heavy weaponry.

The travesty of decorum in neighbourly relations did not cease there, as the familiar pattern of the obfuscation of facts and diversionary tactics took over. We were then issued by the Government of Pakistan a list of 76 so-called suspected terrorists in Afghanistan which, after close inspection by us and our international partners, was found to be in desperate need of verification.

Our reaction to all these provocations has been sober and methodical. We have submitted 25 protest notes to the Government of Pakistan and, in the past few weeks, have summoned their Ambassador to Kabul on three occasions. We have submitted to their Government a list of 86 known terrorists and 32 Taliban training centres, including Haqqani network centres, asking for their immediate closure. We have asked for a third-party verification of the two sides' efforts. No response has yet been received. The Secretary-General, the Security Council and other international partners are all appraised of these developments.

While terrorist attacks in Pakistan are strongly deplored by our Government, we are surely witnessing the blowback effects of using violent proxies as instruments of foreign policy, which was adopted by decision-making circles in that country in the 1980s and is still being pursued to this day. In other words, the chickens are coming home to roost. We have reminded our Pakistani counterparts on many occasions that you reap what you sow. We say once again that it is time for Pakistan to change that failed policy for its own sake, desist from using radical terrorists as a foreign policy accessory, and genuinely join the international fight against all forms and shades of terrorism.

By making Afghanistan bleed, Pakistan is not only trying to create a stalemate on the battlefield, but it is also hindering the political track. Hoping to gain legitimacy for groups, such as the Taliban, Pakistani decision-makers continue to use plausible deniability and shifting blame, as part of their defensive tactics while manipulating geopolitical fault lines to their advantage. They forget that legitimacy in my country flows through the people and constitutional order, not through acts of terror, intimidation and forced imposition of extremist thinking and radical behaviour by misinterpreting and misusing our sacred religion of Islam. Talks leading to a peace process can only succeed when policy is revised, the use of sanctuaries is prohibited, terrorist financing is curbed and violence is renounced. Peace cannot be achieved by paying lip service and pretending to be a selective victim.

As we speak, the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces are battling, with great resilience and determination, a network of regional and global terrorist groups, who have come to Afghanistan with various objectives. In 2016, our forces prevented the Taliban and terrorist affiliates from capturing major population centres. In January, we adopted a four-year national security strategy, which focuses on bolstering combat capabilities, leadership development and improving unity and coordination of command. The fight against terrorism will continue with even greater resolve, on the basis of our security strategy. That said, continued support from our international partners remains critical for the sustainability of our forces over the long haul. In that light, I wish to reiterate here again that Afghanistan's strategic partnerships will in no way be a detriment to any country within our region or beyond. On the contrary, investments in Afghanistan's security are in fact an investment in regional and global security.

For years, the lack of a meaningful and results-oriented channel of dialogue aimed at addressing the

root causes of tension between Kabul and Islamabad has created a huge trust deficit. Reducing this deficit requires political will and healthy interactions between our two countries. On our part, if we look at the record, Afghanistan has always been ready to engage in constructive and results-oriented dialogue.

We welcome any earnest and transparent initiative to help us reach that stage of dialogue. In our view, the Quadrilateral Coordination Group and the recent six-party Moscow conference on Afghanistan can be useful in that endeavour, if utilized and coordinated properly. These initiatives, among others, emphasize a set of guiding principles, most notably that any peace process should be Afghan-led and that the region must support the Afghan Government in its quest for sustainable peace. Moreover, they also recognize the importance of having all relevant regional and global actors on board in a constructive manner.

We know from previous experience that any prospect of success in peace efforts rests on a number of important principles.First, any attempt at resolving current and/or historic issues between Governments requires strong national political will and an impartial and agreed upon international arbitrator in good standing. Secondly, all sides need to define and agree on the scope of dialogue and negotiations, leading to a specific set of deliverables and outcomes that can be supported by regional stakeholders and eventually guaranteed by the international community. Thirdly, all sides need to be willing to address the root causes of conflict, not its byproducts, and resolve areas of contention by adhering to and making use of international law, pragmatic precedence and/or other best practices and judicial norms, and avoiding presumed realpolitik assumptions. Fourthly, given Afghanistan's sensitive geopolitical position, all peacebuilding and anti-terrorism efforts in the long run need to have all key stakeholders on board, take the complexities of an evolving regional and global security architecture into account, and agree to a status that assures stability, balance, non-interference, sovereignty and positive engagement in Afghanistan. Fifthly, keeping principles of sovereignty and non-interference central to our objectives requires Afghanistan to become a symbol of international cooperation, where global and regional powers set aside their rivalries and short-term interests by agreeing to cooperate in a spirit of confidence for long-term mutual benefit.

In a few days we will celebrate Nowruz — the start of our New Year and the first day of spring — a festive occasion that symbolizes peace, solidarity and togetherness among our people and the wider region at large. But as recent attacks have shown, Afghans will celebrate with a heavy heart. On the other hand, with their planned so-called spring offensive, the Taliban and other terrorist groups are adamantly focused on producing more horror, panic and fear, leaving little room for joy among our men, women and children.

This time, we hope to collectively counter their new season of murder and mayhem. Our brave and courageous national security forces are ready and highly determined to defend our people with full confidence and strength. We survived the post-transition 2015; we countered and defeated every major plan of the terrorist groups and their foreign backers to capture and control the main population centres in 2016; and in 2017 we will, with the Council's support and by the grace of God Almighty, humiliate and destroy the enemies of peace and security in Afghanistan. We are fully committed to making sure that our New Year will be one in which we will open the way for durable peace in our country, our region and around the world. We join Secretary-General António Guterres in his appeal to the international community for making 2017 a year of peace. For us, it starts at home.

The President: I now give the floor to the members of the Security Council. I would like to remind all speakers that as per presidential note S/2010/507, the presidency encourages all speakers to conclude their remarks within five minutes. The red microphone light will flash to indicate when the five minutes is up, meaning that it is time for a delegation to wrap up its remarks. We have a full morning of speakers inscribed on the list and a busy afternoon as well, so if necessary I will use the gavel to respectfully encourage speakers to stick to the time limit.

Mr. Bessho (Japan): I would like to thank Special Representative Yamamoto and Ms. Sima Samar, of the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission, for their informative briefings today. They have given us useful insights into the situation in Afghanistan today and how the international community might assist the Afghan people. We are working with the other members of the Council to prepare a new draft resolution extending the mandate of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), which we expect to adopt next week.

As the Secretary-General's most recent report (S/2017/189) makes clear, there is little good news coming from Afghanistan. Civilian casualties are at a record high, an alarming trend that has continued since 2013. Some 30,000 people have now died in the course of the conflict. Nearly 1,000 children were killed in 2016 alone. That is an appalling waste of life and potential for Afghanistan's future. The numbers are particularly tragic because human resources and human development must be the foundation of Afghanistan's future economic development and self-reliance. This year will continue to present grave challenges for security in Afghanistan. The Council has already issued four press statements condemning terrorist attacks. While there are many initiatives and ongoing efforts regarding security in Afghanistan, what we need most are concrete results that counter the negative trends we are seeing.

We should continue to insist on seeing progress made with Afghanistan's anti-corruption and reform agenda, while also exploring mid-term and long-term engagement that can strengthen the country's basis for socioeconomic development. Employment is key. Japan's approach in that regard is not as visible as the various regional cooperation projects highlighted in the related documents on Afghanistan. We believe that the emphasis should be on strengthening the resilience of society. That includes supporting core industries such as agriculture through market rehabilitation and access, and backing the Government's comprehensive national agricultural development priority programme, which will help to increase employment.

We must address the imminent security threats. We appreciated the outcome of the NATO Warsaw Summit last year and its steady implementation. The Resolute Support Mission's role is essential. Regional cooperation also contributes to security, and we ask UNAMA to coordinate the various efforts for maximum impact. Improving capacity and human resources in the security sector is especially important. Afghanistan requires a combination of short-term efforts and mid-to-long-term engagement. Japan would like to once again emphasize the importance of a results-based approach that goes beyond mere commitments. Only actual implementation and outcomes will bring hope to the Afghan people, through fewer casualties, higher employment, more training and more land for better agricultural production.

As the lead country in the Council on this dossier, Japan will strive to create greater opportunities for better understanding the actual situation on the ground and how the Council can do a better job of supporting concrete improvements in security and development. We hope that will link to reinvigorated discussion in New York and a better future for Afghanistan.

Mr. Alemu (Ethiopia): I would like to begin by expressing our appreciation to Mr. Yamamoto, Special Representative of the Secretary-General, for his comprehensive briefing on the report of the Secretary-General (S/2017/189) on Afghanistan and the activities of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA). And I would like to thank the Secretary-General for the report itself, which we have found very useful, particularly for those, like us, who make no claim to deep knowledge of the Afghan situation. I would also like to thank the Permanent Representative of Afghanistan and the Chair of the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission for their remarks.

Despite the notable progress that has been made in the three areas that Mr. Yamamoto referred to in his briefing, Afghanistan continues to face enormous challenges, as the Secretary-General's report and the statement by the representative of Afghanistan, even more so, make clear. It is self-evident that the country needs understanding and support. It seems that the political situation, including at the highest level, also needs coherence. It is in the light of this situation that we see the need for sustained support and cooperation on the part of the international community if Afghanistan is to overcome those challenges. In that regard, the efforts of UNAMA to promote peace, reconciliation and development in Afghanistan, with full respect for the country's sovereignty and the Afghan Government's leadership and ownership of the process, continue to be very important, and we support the renewal of its mandate for another year.

As the Secretary-General's report clearly states, the security situation has not been improving. On the contrary, it was worse in 2016 than in 2015, and that trend appears to be continuing this year. The report underlines, quite appropriately in our view, the fact that it is civilians who are paying the highest price. The threats posed by the Taliban, Al-Qaida, the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant and other armed groups are a serious security concern not only for the country but also the wider region. The increasing numbers

of terrorist attacks, such as those that occurred recently in Kabul and other parts of the country, are a clear indication of how far the security situation has deteriorated. We would like to take this opportunity to reiterate our firm condemnation of the terrorist attacks and to express our deepest sympathy and condolences to the families of the victims as well as the people and the Government of Afghanistan. The illegal trafficking of drugs has been further complicating the security situation in Afghanistan and the wider region.

As Special Representative Yamamoto indicated, Afghanistan's long-term security and stability can be ensured only through a comprehensive and inclusive Afghan-led and Afghan-owned political process. In that connection, we note the progress that has been made in implementing the peace agreement with Hizb-i Islami Gulbuddin, including the lifting of sanctions against Gulbuddin Hekmatyar. However, we understand that the peace talks between the Government and the Taliban have remained stalled. Obviously, listening to the statement by the representative of Afghanistan, we can see how that process is indeed daunting. As the Secretary-General's report notes, the role of other countries in the region is also critical to creating the necessary conditions for advancing the peace efforts.

Lastly, the political and security situation in Afghanistan will not improve if we do not take a comprehensive approach to addressing the economic and development challenges facing the country. It is imperative that the international community provide coordinated support to reconstruction and development efforts through the implementation of the national framework for peace and development in Afghanistan. We hope that the commitments made at the Brussels conference last October will be honoured.

I would like to conclude by expressing our support for and solidarity with the Afghan Government in its herculean task of addressing the country's multiple challenges with a view to promoting peace, reconciliation and development. I also wish to express our appreciation to UNAMA for its role in support of those endeavours and its efforts to fulfil its mandate under difficult circumstances.

Mr. Lambertini (Italy): I would like to thank Special Representative Yamamoto for his comprehensive briefing, and to pay tribute to Ms. Sima Samar for her work and courage as a powerful voice for human rights and women's rights in Afghanistan. I welcome the fact that she is the first woman ever to speak in the Security Council on Afghanistan.

Italy strongly condemns the heinous terrorist attack that took place two days ago at a Kabul military hospital, as well as all other attacks that have been carried out in that country. We extend our deepest condolences to the families of all of the victims.

We also reiterate our support for the efforts of the Government of National Unity to combat terrorism and violent extremism, which continue to represent serious threats to the security and stability of Afghanistan. It is essential to have Afghan security and defence forces that are capable of addressing those persistent challenges effectively and autonomously.

In the framework of the NATO-led Resolute Support Mission, Italy is committed to providing tangible support to the Government of Afghanistan's in its efforts to strengthen the national defence security force. The members of the force deserve to be recognized for their bravery. We also note the important progress achieved thus far in improving the capability of the security forces, also thanks to NATO and its partners for their assistance. We hope those achievements can serve as a solid foundation for further progress.

The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan's (UNAMA) statistics for 2016 consistently show high levels of violence in the Afghan conflict. We are deeply concerned about the further increase in civilian casualties, as outlined in the Secretary-General report (S/2017/189), as well as the alarming situation of internally displaced persons and returnees. Our imperative must be to work together, to renew our efforts to break the spiral of violence and to lay the foundation for lasting peace and stability in Afghanistan.

In that context, my country wishes to reiterate its full support for the commitment of the Government of National Unity to launch an Afghan-led and -owned peace process. That objective would require the constructive involvement of all international and regional stakeholders capable of making a significant contribution. In that regard, especially in its capacity as a non-permanent member of the Security Council, Italy strongly supports all of those initiatives.

In order to increase opportunities for dialogue and political understanding in Afghanistan between the Government and the insurgent movements, it is essential that there also be a positive climate and true

cooperation among neighbouring countries. It is our sincere hope that this condition will soon be met on the basis of enduring common interests, such as the fight against terrorism and violent extremism, which is a dangerous destabilizing factor — not only for Afghanistan but for the region as a whole.

Achieving peace, stability and development in Afghanistan also requires the consolidation of its institutions and the transformation of the State through effective Government action that can meet the needs and legitimate expectations of its people. The Government of National Unity is engaged in a fundamental reform process, most recently as it concerns the Afghanistan National Peace and Development Framework and the priority national programmes. We therefore welcome the determination of the Government of Afghanistan and the many results already achieved in various sectors.

Together with our partners in the international community, Italy renewed its tangible support for that internal reform process at the Brussels Conference on Afghanistan last October. Nevertheless, it is crucial that those reform efforts, for which an internally cohesive Government is an essential prerequisite, continue making further progress towards self-reliance. Quick and decisive action towards further reform is especially important in order to meet the legitimate aspirations of the overwhelming majority of the Afghan people. Should those hopes be dashed, it will inevitably lead to distrust in the institution of the State.

The fight against corruption must continue to be a top priority. We therefore appreciate the engagement and the initial measures adopted by the Government in that regard, and we urge it to proceed resolutely forward in that struggle.

Another priority must continue to be the persistent defence and promotion of the rights of women and their empowerment at every level of society. We are therefore concerned about the risk of setbacks in that area, such as limited access to education for young women and girls — also due to the deteriorating security situation. We invite the Government of Afghanistan to make further efforts in that regard. Furthermore, we hope that the affirmation of the rights of women can also be achieved with a view to promoting the peace process through their active participation in the framework of future negotiations.

In the light of encouraging developments in recent months in the area of elections, we urge the Government of Afghanistan to prioritize the completion of the reform process, so as to allow for the holding of parliamentary district elections in a democratic, transparent and inclusive manner.

Afghanistan's Government can count on the international community's full support, which has provided an exceptional level of assistance to that end. But Afghan institutions have to be in the driver's seat, as the primary responsibility for progress lies with them, in keeping with the principle of mutual accountability, which today, more than ever, constitutes a cornerstone of our partnership.

Lastly, in the difficult and complex circumstances that Afghanistan is currently facing, UNAMA continues to play an essential role in coordinating the international community's support, with the common goal of achieving peace and sustainable development for the Afghan people. Italy therefore associates itself with the expression of warm appreciation for its work and supports the upcoming renewal of its mandate.

Mr. Skau (Sweden): Let me join others in thanking Special Representative Yamamoto for his briefing this morning. We very much welcome the report (S/2017/189) of the Secretary-General, which underlines the important work being carried out by the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA). We believe that UNAMA continues to play a critical role in the stabilization process and in preventing renewed conflict in Afghanistan. We are particularly pleased to see the significant attention given to women and peace and security in the report. In that light, I would also like to welcome today's very rich briefing by Ms. Sima Samar.

Sweden remains fully committed to supporting the Afghan people on their path to a democratic, prosperous and peaceful society. The report before us today makes clear that there is still some distance to travel on that journey. It shows that, while progress has been made in some areas, the economic, political and security outlook remains bleak. Moving forward will require the full implementation of the economic and political reforms pledged by the Government at the Brussels Conference on Afghanistan. We welcome UNAMA's continued efforts to support Afghanistan's full assumption of leadership and ownership for its security, governance and development, consistent with the transformation decade. As Special Representative of the Secretary-General Yamamoto just highlighted,

the international community cannot afford to lose focus of the socioeconomic development of Afghanistan. We must channel our efforts to supporting equitable growth that can tangibly deliver employment and prosperity for all Afghans, particularly Afghanistan's youth.

We encourage the Government to continue to take the necessary steps towards holding free, inclusive and transparent elections that are credible in the eyes of the Afghan people. Women's full and equal participation in the electoral process is essential. We urge UNAMA to continue to pay increased attention to women's participation in the electoral and political processes in its reporting. Women's full and active participation in public and political spheres is crucial to ensuring lasting peace and the elimination of poverty. Women's meaningful inclusion in the peace process, including the ongoing implementation of the peace agreement with Hizb-i-Islami Gulbuddin is therefore vital. Excluding half of the population from the peace process is not only wrong, but shortsighted. Women's inclusion in peace processes has been proven to lead to more successful and sustainable peace agreements.

The humanitarian, human rights and the security situation in Afghanistan remains alarming. We are particularly concerned to hear that the number of civilian casualties is at the highest level since 2009 — many of them children. Indeed, Afghanistan is one of the most dangerous places in the world to be a child. Shockingly, in 2015, one out of every four casualties in Afghanistan was a child. Children also live in fear of abduction, hunger and recruitment as child soldiers. We call on all parties to the conflict to stop all targeted and deliberate attacks against civilians and to take all the necessary measures to protect them.

All violations of international humanitarian law must be condemned. We strongly condemn the recent attack on the International Committee of the Red Cross, as well as Wednesday's attack on a hospital in Kabul. All parties to the conflict must implement and respect resolution 2286 (2016), pertaining to the protection of health care in conflicts. We call on the Afghan Government to report to the Secretary-General on measures taken to implement the resolution. Places where the young and the sick seek support should never be targeted.

Building peaceful and inclusive societies is not easy. It takes courage and determination from all parties. A politically negotiated settlement to the conflict in Afghanistan is the only way to achieve a sustainable peace and the only way to build an Afghanistan in which all citizens, regardless of gender, religion or ethnicity, can fully play their part and reach their full potential. Reaching such a settlement is more urgent than ever. We strongly encourage continued Afghan-owned and -led efforts towards unity and cooperation, along the lines of the negotiated deal with Hizb-i Islami. Increased political dialogue with other insurgent groups, including the Taliban, is now needed.

As pointed out by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, regional tensions continue to undermine long-term stability and economic growth in Afghanistan. A peaceful and prosperous Afghanistan would benefit the entire region. We call on all actors, not least Afghanistan's neighbours, to act constructively and responsibly for peace. We encourage the United Nations system — both on the ground and at Headquarters — to actively engage in activities and dialogue promoting regional cooperation and stability.

Finally, Sweden has consistently and significantly assisted Afghanistan for more than three decades. Our support for the people of Afghanistan remains firm, and we will continue to support them in their efforts towards a peaceful and stable society for all.

Mr. Lamek (France) (*spoke in French*): Allow me at the outset to reiterate France's condolences to the Afghan people and to the families of the victims of the attack committed 8 March in Kabul. France categorically condemns these acts, which seek to hinder Afghanistan's recovery and whose perpetrators must not go unpunished.

Allow me also warmly to thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Tadamichi Yamamoto, and Ms. Sima Samar, for being with us today and for their briefings. France aligns itself in advance with the statement to be delivered on behalf of the European Union.

The National Unity Government is in the third year of its mandate, and its commitment and its efforts to ensure a democratic, stable and prosperous Afghanistan must be welcomed. The Brussels conference in October 2016 showed once again its determination to move forward with reforms, but also was a reminder that the international community was still standing by Afghanistan. France reiterates its full support to the Government of Afghanistan and encourages it to

continue its efforts to promote the development and stabilization of the country.

Unfortunately, the continued deterioration of the security situation is extremely troubling, as reflected in the sad list of civilian casualties for 2016. Despite the brave efforts of the Afghan security forces with the support of international partners, attacks by the Taliban and Da'esh continue to unremittingly target the civilian population. On top of this already overwhelming human cost is another cost, which is the way in which the situation of insecurity weighs on the economic development of the country and its progress towards stability. We must not falter in our efforts to combat this violence and to protect civilians, especially women and children, as my Swedish colleague pointed out.

With respect to the security situation, it is all the more urgent that we relaunch our efforts for a peace process led by and for Afghans. The resumption of dialogue with the Taliban remains a crucial prospect. France therefore calls on all regional actors, in particular Pakistan, to use their influence to enable an end to the fighting and a resumption of peace negotiations. The establishment of a lasting peace in the country is our collective responsibility as well as that of all Afghan actors.

I turn now to the issue of drug trafficking, which has been fuelling the Taliban insurgency. It poses a threat to the health of the Afghan population and must continue to mobilize the Afghan Government. Here too, the Government can rely on the support of the international community in the implementation of its national plan of action, including through the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, which is providing valuable technical cooperation. A high level of ambition must at all costs be maintained on this subject as well as in combating corruption, since both are critical to bringing about positive changes in the field of development and security.

Finally, the spike in 2016 in the number of internally displaced persons and refugees also poses a major challenge. As noted in the Secretary-General's report (S/2017/189), the Afghan Government has committed to absorbing this flow as best it can. We therefore commend and encourage the coordination planned with the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) to respond to this migratory crisis, in particular to provide assistance to undocumented refugees, who are the most vulnerable group.

There is a still a long way to go in the transformation decade, but the course charted by the Afghan Government is the right one, as reflected in preparations for electoral reform and parliamentary elections. On this issue as well as on others, Afghanistan can rely on the full support of France and the international community. Renewing UNAMA's mandate, which is due in the coming days, will be further proof of this. In this still-fragile context, the full commitment of the United Nations in support of the Afghan Government is of crucial importance.

Let me conclude by commending the work done on the ground by all United Nations personnel in Afghanistan, who are dealing with particularly difficult conditions, and we pay tribute to them all through the Special Representative of the Secretary-General.

Mr. Wu Haitao (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I wish at the outset, Mr. President, to thank you for having convened this debate on the issue of Afghanistan. China has listened attentively to the briefing delivered by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Tadamichi Yamamoto, and to the statements made by Ms. Samar of the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission and Ambassador Saikal, Permanent Representative of Afghanistan to the United Nations.

At present, Afghanistan is in a crucial state of transition. China commends the National Unity Government for its unremitting efforts in maintaining national stability, promoting national reconciliation and facilitating economic development. At the same time, the country is still facing grave challenges across the political, economic and security fields. In order to help Afghanistan respond to challenges, the international community must continue to provide firm support in the following areas.

First, it must vigorously improve the Afghan security situation. The international community must invest heavily in supporting the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces capacity-building, and enhance its self-defence capacity to effectively deal with the threats of terrorism, transnational crime and drug smuggling. General Assembly resolutions have confirmed the security cooperation between and among regional countries, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and Afghanistan. We hope that all parties concerned will continue to push it forward.

Secondly, it is important to steadfastly promote the national reconciliation process. Advancing the national

reconciliation process is the only way to ensure long-term peace in Afghanistan. All parties in Afghanistan must focus on the national interest and the people's interests and participate actively in the reconciliation process. The international community must fully support the inclusive Afghan-owned and Afghan-led reconciliation process so that all parties can join the peace talks with fruitful results without further delay.

Thirdly, it is imperative to substantively assist Afghanistan in enhancing its governance capability. On issues concerning Afghanistan, it is the people of Afghanistan who have the final say. The international community must truly respect the right of the Afghan people independently to choose their political system and development path, and at the same time, on the basis of the national development strategy and specific needs, assist the Government in enhancing its administrative capability in a targeted way.

Fourthly, it must more effectively assist Afghanistan in its integration into regional development. The international community must make good on its commitment of assistance and support Afghanistan in its economic development. With resource endowments and geographical strength, Afghanistan enjoys broad prospects in regional economic cooperation.

General Assembly and Security Council resolutions have confirmed the great significance of the One Belt, One Road project to promote Afghan economic development and regional cooperation. It is our hope that all parties can jointly promote the One Belt, One Road project to enhance regional economic cooperation and connectivity, so as to assistancest Afghanistan in its social and economic development.

China commends the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) for its work. We laud UNAMA for its assistance to Afghanistan in maintaining national stability, promoting economic development and enhancing governance capability. We will continue to support the work of UNAMA and Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Yamamoto.

China and Afghanistan have been good friends and close neighbours for generations. China looks forward to the achievement of peace, security, stability and development. China will continue to support Afghanistan in enhancing its security capacity-building and in combating terrorism and will support the Shanghai Cooperation Organization as it plays an active part in that regard. China will continue to support the Afghan peace and reconciliation process and participate actively in the Quadrilateral Coordination Group made up of Afghanistan, Pakistan, China and the United States of America, and other relevant mechanisms and processes.

China supports Afghanistan in its integration into regional cooperation. We will align our One Belt, One Road initiative with Afghanistan's National Development Strategy. Together with the international community, we will make concerted efforts towards the swift achievement of peace, stability and development in Afghanistan.

Mr. Seck (Senegal) (*spoke in French*): I would like to begin by thanking Mr. Tadamichi Yamamoto, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Ms. Sima Samar, Chair of the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission, as well as our colleague, Ambassador Saikal, Permanent Representative of Afghanistan for their briefings. I also thank Ambassador Kairat Umarov, Permanent Representative of Kazakhstan, and his entire team for the excellent work they have been conducting at the helm of the Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011) since January 2017.

The security situation in Afghanistan remains of concern, with deadly terrorist attacks like that carried out on 10 January in Kandahar, which killed 15 civilians, including six diplomats of the United Arab Emirates, and the attack carried out on 8 March — International Women's Day — on a military hospital in Kabul, claiming more than 40 victims. On behalf of my delegation, I take this opportunity to strongly condemn indiscriminate terrorist attacks that take the lives of thousands of innocent people. That tragedy serves to remind us that despite the progress made, in particular to promote political dialogue and national cohesion, the country still faces major political, security, economic and humanitarian challenges.

At the political level, we welcome efforts towards a rapprochement between the country's two leaders, President Ashraf Ghani and Chief Executive Abdullah Abdullah through constructive dialogue to improve their working relationship. Similarly, progress made in implementing the peace agreement between Hizb-international Islami (Gulbuddin) and the Government, as well as the launch of the electoral reform process and the good management and smooth functioning of upcoming elections, not to mention the Afghan

Government's efforts to combat drug trafficking with new legislation, should be welcomed. Nonetheless, we lament the lack of progress in the peace process between the Government and the Taliban, as it continues to have an adverse impact on the country's continually deteriorating security situation, in particular in provinces in the south, north and north-east of the country where fighting persists. In an environment of frequent terrorist attacks, we are reassured nonetheless by the presence and efforts of international forces fighting against terrorist groups, in particular the Taliban and Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant.

The human rights and the humanitarian situations remain of concern due to ongoing insecurity, as reflected by the increase in the number of civilian victims, including women and children who continue to pay a high price. The return of refugees, in particular from Pakistan, including more than 650,000 additional internally displaced persons — a record number in 2016 — exacerbates a humanitarian situation that is already of concern in an economic environment that remains grim. The work of the United Nations and non-governmental organizations that continue to meet the needs of the needs of those people is remarkable.

Nonetheless, it is clear that Afghanistan requires additional support and solidarity from the international community. In that regard, the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission that Ms. Samar so courageously and ably chairs deserves special support. With regard to regional cooperation, we welcome the improvement of relations between the Afghan Government and the Governments of neighbouring countries, such as Pakistan, Uzbekistan, Iran, the Russian Federation, the United Arab Emirates, in the political, security and economic spheres.

In conclusion, once again, on behalf of the Senegalese delegation, I would like to offer congratulations and encouragement to the Afghan Government on its commendable efforts to combat corruption and impunity, as well as on its land tenure legislation and commitment to promoting gender equality and improving the status of women. I reiterate Senegal's support for the Permanent Representative and his team at the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan. Once again, Senegal calls upon the international community to offer ongoing, multifaceted support, as illustrated at the 2016 Brussels Conference, and to remain committed to the stability and recovery of the great country that is Afghanistan. My delegation also supports the extension of the mandate of the Mission by one year so that it can build on its achievements and make further progress.

Mr. Llorentty Soliz (Bolivia) (*spoke in Spanish*): At the outset, I thank you, Sir, for convening today's meeting. I also thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Tadamichi Yamamoto, and I take this opportunity to voice support for his efforts. I also thank Ms. Sima Samar, Chair of the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission, and His Excellency Ambassador Mahmoud Saikal, Permanent Representative of Afghanistan, for their briefings.

I would like to thank you in particular, Sir, for that moment of silence because it reminds us that at times silence is more eloquent than words. In that regard, we reiterate our full commitment to the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of Afghanistan, as well as to supporting its Government.

We acknowledge the ongoing resilience and commitment of the Afghan Government at this difficult time. We support the Government and people of Afghanistan in their fight against terrorism. We recognize that terrorism is a global threat and that the fight of various peoples — including the people of Afghanistan — against terrorism is everyone's fight. My delegation reiterates its firm support for the reconciliation and reintegration efforts undertaken by the Government of Afghanistan out of respect for its Constitution, non-violence and respect for the human rights of the Afghan people. We would also like to show our support for the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, which continues to provide information on the situation and fulfil its mandate, in spite of the recurring political, security and economic challenges.

According to the report of the Secretary-General (S/2017/189), the Afghan Government continues to face serious challenges. The report also underscores the ongoing gravity of the situation. The ongoing deterioration of the security situation is of concern. The number of security incidents stood at a record 23,702 in 2016. That figure, which is alarmingly high, translates to approximately 65 incidents per day or almost three per hour. Armed clashes between the security forces and the Taliban accounted for 63 per cent of the security incidents. We voice our concern about the presence and potential increase in the number of Da'esh affiliates in Afghanistan who are a serious threat to the security of Afghanistan and of countries in the region, including

those in Central Asia. We also reaffirm our support for the efforts of the Afghan national security and defence forces as they seek to combat these threats, as well as our support to the international partners of Afghanistan.

We are troubled by the continuous terrorist activity in the region. On 8 March a terrorist attack perpetrated by local affiliates of Da'esh took place in Kabul, resulting in more than 120 victims — including the dead and the injured. Already in 2017 we have had the 10 January attack in Kabul, which also resulted in more than 120 dead or injured, and the suicide attack in Helmand, in which over 13 people were killed. That is in addition to the 7 February attack on the Supreme Court in Kabul, which resulted in at least 21 dead and more than 40 wounded.

We are also concerned about the plight of civilian victims, in particular children and women. There have been reports of a 24 per cent increase — in comparison to 2016 — with regard to violence against children. Moreover, violence against women is still frequent, as seen in the attacks against women in their places of work. The humanitarian situation, as pointed out in the report, is quite troubling. We call upon the international media to refrain from either ignoring this or engaging in double standards when talking about the havoc wrought by terrorism. The world must be aware and continually reminded of the sacrifices of the Afghan people in combating these global threats.

The commitments of the international community made during various conferences to provide assistance in terms of security and development to the people and Government of Afghanistan, including the Brussels Conference on Afghanistan and the recent Ministerial Conference of the Heart of Asia — Istanbul Process, transformed political will into concrete initiatives intended to promote the stabilization and reform efforts incorporated in the Afghanistan National Peace and Development Framework.

We express our support for the efforts of the Afghan Government to combat drug trafficking, which continues to serve as a significant source of financing for terrorist groups. In that regard, the international community needs to take more decisive action with respect to tax havens, which serve as a means to introduce money from drug trafficking into the international financial system.

We welcome the 21 January launch by the Government of Afghanistan and the United Nations of the humanitarian response plan for $550 million, with a view to meeting the critical humanitarian needs of 5.7 million people.

In conclusion, we would like to emphasize the need to promote greater socioeconomic development as a necessity to the achievement of lasting peace, stability and prosperity in Afghanistan. In that vein, we welcome initiatives aimed at promoting close cooperation between Afghanistan, regional associations and the international community. Lastly, we remain convinced that the United Nations, with full respect for the sovereignty of Afghanistan, will continue to play a key role, contributing to the realization of the aspirations of Afghanistan to achieve national unity and lasting stability.

Mr. Aboulatta (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, allow me to thank Mr. Tadamichi Yamamoto for his comprehensive briefing, which was based on the report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security (S/2017/189).

I should like to underline the important role played by the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) last year. In 2016, we bore witness to many developments, which the Mission addressed positively. We therefore look forward to working with other Council members in the next few days to extend the mandate of UNAMA for a further 12 months.

We also wish to congratulate the Afghan Government on the major efforts it has undertaken in the face of grave challenges, in particular the deteriorating humanitarian situation and the troubling consequences for women and children. In that vein, we urge the international community, and UNAMA in particular, to make further efforts to mediate between the Government and the Taliban in order to end the cycle of violence and conflict between them.

We also encourage the Afghan Government to reach internal agreements. In that regard, we appreciate the latest achievements with regard to the establishment of a consultative mechanism on high-level Government posts and power-sharing. We also support the efforts of the Government to complete the organizational bases for elections in order to hold parliamentary elections as soon as possible. As for the efforts of the Government to combat corruption, we believe that the creation of the Anti-Corruption Justice Centre is a step on the right

path. We encourage further steps to achieve justice and to draw in further foreign investments.

Egypt strongly condemns the barbaric acts of terrorism that have been committed in Afghanistan over the past few months. We express our concern at the exponential rise in such attacks during the past year. We condemn in particular the barbaric acts against a major hospital in Kabul yesterday.

Allow me to take this opportunity to reaffirm the importance of combatting and uprooting Da'esh in the context of the Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy. We also stress that the narcotics trade is a threat to stability and security in Afghanistan and Central Asia as a whole. Moreover, we express our concern at the increase in opium production in 2016, in addition to the exponential increase in the production of synthetic drugs. We stress the importance of close regional and international coordination with the Afghan authorities with a view to combating the narcotics trade, including by addressing the issue of illegal money transfers. That cannot be separated from the efforts to combat terrorism because drugs are one of the main sources of funding for armed militias and terrorist groups.

Egypt appreciates fully its historic and traditional ties with Afghanistan. We also appreciate the repercussions the security situation there has on stability in both Central Asia and the Middle East, and we support the efforts of the Afghan Government to combat terrorism. We support the efforts of the Afghan authorities to develop programmes aimed at increasing the prosperity of the Afghan people.

In conclusion, Egypt reiterates its full support for Afghanistan. We also appreciate that country's need to improve its capabilities so that it can overcome these important obstacles and achieve stability, peace, security and sustainable development.

Mr. Rosselli (Uruguay) (*spoke in Spanish*): At the outset, allow me to thank Ms. Samar, Mr. Yamamoto and our colleague Ambassador Saikal for their respective statements.

I must first of all refer to the brutal terrorist attack committed on Wednesday in Kabul against a medical facility and reiterate on this occasion our condolences to the people and Government of Afghanistan. Uruguay categorically condemns this and all terrorist attacks. We are troubled by the increasing frequency of indiscriminate attacks against medical facilities. We call for full compliance with resolution 2286 (2016) on the protection of the sick and wounded, and of medical personnel and facilities. Moreover, we recall that attacks on hospitals and medical personnel are a violation of international humanitarian law and may constitute war crimes. We insist that those crimes not go unpunished and that the perpetrators be brought to account.

Uruguay supports the work of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) and endorses the recommendation of the Secretary-General to extend its mandate by a further year. My delegation is troubled by the deteriorating security conditions in the country, which have been described by the Secretary-General as the worst since the deployment of UNAMA. In 2016, we saw the highest number of victims in a single year since 2009. We are also troubled by the lack of progress made toward peace between the Afghan Government and the Taliban, a group that has increased its activities, as well as its influence over part of the Afghan territory.

The United Nations and the international community must maintain their support for Afghanistan, given the long road that still lies ahead in restoring and consolidating lasting peace and in rebuilding the country. The strengthening of democratic institutions is a priority in order to achieve stability. I therefore wish to highlight the progress made in the electoral process, the preparation of next year's parliamentary elections and the Government's efforts in the fight against corruption.

While the strategy and action plan on the elimination of violence against women for the period 2016-2020, adopted by the Government, is a positive step, we are concerned that a joint commission comprising members of the lower and upper houses of the National Assembly approved a revised text of the law on the elimination of harassment against women and children. The plan awaits implementation and presidential approval.

The situation of human rights in Afghanistan has deterioated over the past year. As ever, girls and children suffer disproportionate violence in conflicts. During the September 2016 debate on Afghanistan (see S/PV.7771), my delegation made a reference to the practice of child marriage and to the need to adopt new legislation to prevent such practices. We welcome the recent news that this practice has finally been criminalized in Afghan legislation. What will be much harder is to enforce the law and, most important of

all, to make it a cultural blueprint for condemning the practice as aberrant.

Uruguay encourages the Government of Afghanistan to pursue reconciliation, acting with leadership to overcome short-, medium- and long-term challenges and making the reforms necessary for the reconstruction of the country in a climate of peace, security and economic development.

In conclusion, we reiterate our thanks to all United Nations personnel and all those involved in the provision of humanitarian aid in the country, who continue to work despite extremely difficult conditions and being subject to frequent attacks.

Mr. Umarov (Kazakhstan): We thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Yamamoto for his comprehensive briefing, as well his for the commitment and contribution of the team of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) to peace and security in Afghanistan.

We also thank Ms. Sima Samar, Chair of the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission, for her briefing, firmly calling for the protection of women's rights and their wider engagement in Afghanistan's development.

We also thank the Permanent Representative of Afghanistan for his statement.

As a State of the region, Kazakhstan takes to heart all the issues regarding the development of Afghanistan and is genuinely interested in its stable, secure and prosperous development. Kazakhstan commends the Afghan leadership for its continued efforts to ensure more effective coordination and proactive engagement with the opposition political parties within the country in order to find common ground on critical issues the country faces. We encourage the recently established Independent Election Commission to introduce new reforms to ensure successful impartial parliamentary and regional elections.

Our delegation highly appreciates the commitment of the Government of Afghanistan to the peace process and calls on all interested sides within and outside the country to exert every effort to support it. We recognize that the political process in Afghanistan is Afghan-led and Afghan-owned. At the same time, Kazakhstan welcomes multilateral engagement at the regional level and supports the recommendation of the Secretary-General that the role of regional countries remains vital to any political process.

We are concerned about the deteriorating situation in Afghanistan, which remains unstable and fragile because of well-known international terrorist organizations — not home-grown, as stated by our Afghan colleague — operating out of that country and posing serious security threats to Afghanistan itself and the countries of the region, including Central Asian States. Kazakhstan underlines that the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and the Collective Security Treaty Organization constantly address the situation in Afghanistan. We commend the work of the NATO-led mission and the efforts of a number of countries to train the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces and reform the security sectors of the army and police.

The increase in poppy cultivation and opium production in Afghanistan poses another big threat to security. We need to combat this scourge and support the coordinated measures taken by Government of Afghanistan, together with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and INTERPOL. The Central Asian Regional Information and Coordination Centre for Combating Illicit Trafficking in Narcotic Drugs, Psychotropic Substances and their Precursors, located in Almaty, plays important role, and we encourage closer cooperation among the countries of origin, transit and destination in that regard.

The armed conflict has resulted in a grave humanitarian situation, with increased numbers of deaths of civilians. Kazakhstan is particularly concerned that the destruction of hospitals and schools has continued. All these violations of international humanitarian law must be prohibited, prosecuted and condemned.

We need to support UNAMA's assistance to the Government in promoting human rights and taking care of the influx of refugees into Afghanistan, as well as in launching the proposed national countering violent extremism strategy for Afghanistan. Kazakhstan provides assistance to Afghanistan by sponsoring the education of 1,000 Afghan students and providing humanitarian assistance to vulnerable Afghan citizens. Kazakhstan and Japan have launched a project that focuses on human rights and the economic independence of Afghan women.

Regional trade and economic and transit-transport cooperation are critical to the economic revival of

Afghanistan. Countering terrorism will not be effective unless we properly address the issues of development. My country therefore proposes the establishment of a United Nations regional centre in Almaty, which already hosts 18 United Nations regional and subregional offices. The centre would promote development, disaster risk-reduction and resilience-building, and coordinate cost-effective humanitarian aid from the United Nations.

We support the development strategy of the One Belt-One Road initiative, as proposed by China, which could bring economic growth and prosperity to our part of the world. Kazakhstan will continue to contribute to bilateral, regional and multilateral action for the recovery, stability, peace and progress of Afghanistan.

Finally, the work of UNAMA is acknowledged as indispensable to these objectives. Its presence, its achievements and successes are necessary in Afghanistan. We support the extension of its mandate for another year.

Ms. Sison (United States of America): I thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Yamamoto for his briefing and for the work of the team of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) in supporting the restoration of peace, reconciliation and development in Afghanistan.

I also thank Ambassador Saikal and Ms. Samar for being with us here today.

The United States joins in the strong condemnation of the deadly attack on an Afghan National Army hospital in Kabul on 8 March. Deliberately targeting a medical facility that provides care for the brave Afghans working to protect their fellow citizens has no possible justification. We extend our deepest and most heartfelt condolences to the families, friends and colleagues of the victims of that senseless and cowardly act.

Since we last met to discuss Afghanistan in December (see S/PV.7844), we have been encouraged by progress towards the goal that we all share of ensuring a secure, inclusive and democratic Afghanistan for all Afghan people. President Ghani and Chief Executive Abdullah continue to work together to strengthen the National Unity Government, establish mechanisms for determining Government appointments, and combat corruption. Election reform is making steady progress, as demonstrated by the transparent and consultative process to select and install commissioners, as well as President Ghani's appointment of Mohammad Warimach as Chief Electoral Officer on 1 March.

We commend the Afghan Government for its continued commitment to an inclusive, Afghan-led peace process, in spite of the continuing attacks. The progress made in implementing the peace agreement with Hizb-i Islami gives us hope for similar progress towards a peaceful resolution of the conflict with the Taliban. The United States calls upon the Taliban to enter into negotiations with the Afghan Government. We also call on Afghanistan's neighbours and the international community to increase pressure on the Taliban to come to the table for talks with the Afghan Government. A political settlement between the Taliban and the Afghan Government remains the best way to end violence and to bring stability to the region.

However, despite those positive developments, Afghanistan continues to face challenges that would test even the strongest Government. Regrettably, those challenges are not new; we have discussed them repeatedly in the Council. But they are within the power of Afghanistan, its neighbours and the international community to address. The Taliban, including the Haqqani Network, affiliates of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham and other armed groups are increasing their attacks, resulting in the death and injury of thousands of Afghans and delaying the progress that Afghanistan so badly needs. The internal displacement of citizens fleeing insecurity presents a humanitarian challenge that is exacerbated by the return of more than 850,000 refugees and undocumented migrants from neighbouring countries. And while development assistance remains robust, a precipitous decrease in domestic and foreign investment has stalled the private-sector-led growth that Afghanistan requires to employ its youth, reduce poverty and provide hope to communities.

In that challenging environment, UNAMA is an essential partner for the people and the Government of Afghanistan and for the international community. The United States therefore strongly supports the renewal of UNAMA's mandate for an additional year. UNAMA plays a critical role in supporting peace and reconciliation, empowering women's voices, defending the human rights of all Afghan citizens and coordinating humanitarian assistance. I also want to highlight that UNAMA's 12 provincial offices are in many places the only permanent international presence outside of Kabul. Those offices are critical in engaging Afghan

citizens outside of the capital as well. In conclusion, we look forward to working with all members on finding ways to maximize UNAMA's very important efforts.

Mr. Yelchenko (Ukraine): I would like to thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Tadamichi Yamamoto for his briefing, as well as to express our full support for the important role played by the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) and all United Nations agencies in supporting Afghanistan and coordinating the international community's assistance to that country. Our special thanks go to Ms. Sima Samar, the first woman to brief the Security Council on Afghanistan.

While Ukraine aligns itself with the statement to be made later today on behalf of the European Union, I would like to raise several points in my national capacity.

Ukraine remains committed to supporting the Afghan-owned and Afghan-led national reconciliation process aimed at bringing lasting peace to Afghanistan. We commend the efforts of the Government of Afghanistan and its international partners in creating an environment conducive to overcoming the stalemate in the peace negotiations and reaching a sustainable resolution of the decades-long conflict in the country.

Yet there can be no tangible progress towards stabilization without the readiness of other regional players to set aside differences and to exert influence on Taliban leaders by denying them shelter and forcing that terrorist group to renounce aggression against Afghanistan. As reported by UNAMA, the situation remains tense. The Taliban, Al-Qaida, the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant and their affiliates continue to maintain their presence in certain parts of Afghanistan. Their armed assaults and recurring suicide attacks continue to claim a high death toll and to have an adverse impact on the country's political, economic and security situation.

We are concerned about the acts of violence and attacks against diplomatic missions and their personnel, as well as humanitarian and medical facilities, which impede international efforts to aid the people of Afghanistan. We are also alarmed by the continued flagrant violations of human rights, maltreatment of the civilian population, summary executions, deliberate abuses and continuing discrimination against women and girls, as well as the use of child soldiers on the territories under Taliban and other terrorist groups' control. In that regard, putting the current Taliban leadership under increased pressure takes on additional importance. We believe that can be an effective tool in persuading them to earnestly participate in peace negotiations.

A successful example of such practice is the peace deal signed with Hizb-i Islami, which greatly contributed to the restoration of normal life in the territories under the control of that group. We call on the Government of Afghanistan to continue the implementation of the agreement in order to build upon achieved results.

We also commend the Afghan Government for implementing its commitments to fight corruption, which hinders the country's development, while also promoting good governance, the rule of law and human rights, continuing electoral reform and strengthening coordination between security forces and law-enforcement agencies to ensure that they can effectively tackle existing security threats.

Cooperation with relevant international financial and trade organizations, as well as regional forums such as the Heart of Asia and the Regional Economic Cooperation Conference on Afghanistan, should continue so as to further the implementation of the Government's economic reform agenda.

The implementation of the national action plan on women and peace and security is also of paramount importance for the sake of creating a stable future for the country by eradicating gender-based violence and elevating women as full and equal partners. We also believe that women's voices have to be included in peace and security decision-making, particularly given the sustained violence against Afghan women leaders and human rights defenders. We ask UNAMA to support the efforts of the Government of Afghanistan in promoting the standards I mentioned while fulfilling the respective national action plan.

Mr. Safronkov (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We are grateful to Special Representative of the Secretary-General Yamamoto for his detailed briefing on the situation in Afghanistan. We actively support his work and that of his highly professional team in Afghanistan and of the Secretariat. We are prepared to extend the mandate of his operation, with just a few slight changes.

We listened with interest to the statement made by Ms. Samar, as we did to the one by Mr. Saikal. I want to say at the very outset that, for Russia, Afghanistan

has always been, and remains, a friendly country, one which today is undergoing difficult times.

We once again reiterate our condolences to the people and the Government of Afghanistan for the victims of the deadly terrorist attacks. We earlier stated our solidarity with our diplomat colleagues from the United Arab Emirates, who were also killed as a result of dastardly terrorist attacks.

We are worried at seeing how things are developing in Afghanistan. We are concerned by the deterioration of the security situation and the surge in terrorist activity over the past few months. The negative trends we are seeing are hampering regional and international efforts to resolve problems in Afghanistan and bring about sustainable development. Civilians are increasingly suffering from the violence. In 2016, the number of peaceful Afghan civilian victims and of people dying as a result of military action or terrorist attacks reached an alarming level of 11,500 victims. We need urgent measures in order to stop those dangerous trends.

We must be honest in recognizing that many issues facing the international military presence have gone unresolved in the past 15 years. We say that not to point the finger at any one, allocate blame or distract attention. We mention it so that everyone realizes that the goal of a resolution in Afghanistan requires the consolidation of regional and international efforts. Only by working together can we address the entire host of built-up complex problems, of which unfortunately there are many.

We are particularly concerned about the growth of the Islamic State and its aspirations to absorb other elements of the armed opposition. The strengthening of that group has been demonstrated by the attack on the hospital in Kabul on 8 March, resulting in numerous victims. We believe that approximately 3,500 members of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham are operating within the country. Given all the sympathizers and sleeping cells, a much higher number may be more realistic. The main theatres of operation are centred in the provinces of Nangarhar, Kunar, Helmand, Kandahar, Faryab, Baghlan and Kunduz. We therefore call on everyone to devote increased attention to that problem and not attempt to ignore it.

A serious threat to the stability of Afghanistan and neighbouring countries, our friends in Central Asia, is generated from the drug problem. We are concerned that, once again, in 2016 there was a surge in poppy cultivation. The increase in drug revenue will inevitably further fuel terrorist activities. We therefore believe that it is necessary to step up international efforts towards combating Afghan drug trafficking. We deem that efforts to assist Afghanistan in that regard need to proceed through using tried and tested regional structures such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and the Collective Security Treaty Organization. We see much potential in strengthening counter-terrorist and counter-narcotics cooperation between Afghanistan and those entities.

We support the Afghan Government's policy aimed at achieving national reconciliation. We are ready to provide assistance to advancing the negotiation process, including flexibly approaching the issue of the possibility of easing the sanctions regime of the relevant sanctions committees with regard to Afghanistan, provided that it does run contrary to the national interests of the country. The main priority of national reconciliation is to bring on board the Taliban in the framework of peace talks. That matter remains to be resolved. We need the harmonization of approaches and the synchronization of all the stakeholders including for collectively combating terrorism.

We take note of the positive potential of Kazakhstan's initiatives. A fundamental response to the challenges that we face involves establishing genuine good-neighbourly relations in the region. The Taliban movement must join the national reconciliation process with Kabul playing the lead, based on the three well-known and approved United Nations principles: recognizing the Constitution of Afghanistan, disarmament and cutting off ties with Al-Qaida, the Islamic State and other terrorist organizations.

Ensuring stability in Afghanistan must lie with the national security forces. Russia has provided Afghanistan free of charge a large provision of weapons and ammunition. We are training Afghan personnel in relevant Russian education institutions. Russia is playing an active role in combating terrorism in Afghanistan. We intend to help Kabul establish its army and police. In order to reinvigorate the settlement process in Afghanistan, Moscow decided to intensify efforts towards developing a single regional approach aimed at promoting the process of national reconciliation. To address that issue, on 27 December 2016 we convened a meeting with China and Pakistan in Moscow and continued with the same format on 15 February with Afghanistan, Iran and India. During

the next phase of that process, we believe that it would be important and timelyto involve our Central Asian partners as well as the United States.

The President: I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of the United Kingdom.

I thank Special Representative Yamamoto for his briefing and for all of his and the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan's (UNAMA) work in Afghanistan. He has the United Kingdom's continued and full support. I also want to pay particular tribute to Ms. Samar, who is not only the first briefer from civil society of our presidency, but also the first-ever civil society briefer from Afghanistan to speak before the Security Council. It has taken 37 years of Afghanistan being on our agenda for this day to become a reality, and I look to future presidencies to make sure that it does not take another 37 years for it to happen again.

As so much has already been said about the situation in Afghanistan, I am going to focus on just two core issues: the need to reduce the violence, and the ongoing priority of human rights. The recent abhorrent attacks underscore the pressing, immediate need for us all to work together to end the violence. The people of Afghanistan have suffered for too long. The human cost has simply been too high, and now, more than ever, a coordinated response is needed from the Afghan Government and society, the region and the international community. As we know all too well, the violence will only increase in the coming weeks as the winter weather retreats across most of the country. We must focus on achieving meaningful steps from all sides. That means tackling the terrorist sanctuaries, their funding and logistical support.

I want to pay tribute to the continued sacrifice of the Afghan security forces as they perform that dangerous and unrelenting task. They have the United Kingdom's full support. As the coalition's lead on the Afghan National Army Officer Academy, we are proud to help train the next generation of Afghanistan's military leaders.

Secondly, we must not lose focus on the pressing need to sustain progress on human rights in Afghanistan, as Ms. Samar so eloquently made clear. The human rights situation today is unrecognizable from that of 2001. Women now hold 28 per cent of parliamentary seats, which was something unthinkable under Taliban rule. For comparison's sake, in the United Kingdom that statistic is 29 per cent. Seven million children are now attending school, of whom more than 3 million are girls. Legislation protecting the rights of the marginalized is in now in place, and Afghanistan's new Anti-Corruption Justice Centre held its first trial late last year in a fair and transparent manner. Those are significant steps. However, as we look to the future of Afghanistan, we should recognize that being better than 2001 is not the benchmark to which to aspire.

We need to help Afghanistan build on the steps taken so far so that all Afghans can enjoy an even safer and more prosperous future in which human rights are a given and not in question. The United Kingdom is doing its part to ensure progress on a broad range of human rights challenges. We are helping increase women's social, economic and political participation and supporting the Government of Afghanistan to reform its electoral system in order to improve the transparency and credibility of elections. We are helping fund institutions that empower Afghans to develop human rights monitoring capabilities, and we are providing training in international humanitarian law to combat abuses. We are doing so because the United Kingdom remains committed to helping the National Unity Government realize its constitutional and international human rights obligations. We will continue to support the Government of Afghanistan, local and international non-governmental organizations, civil society organizations and international partners to help make that a reality.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

I thank the representatives of members of the Security Council for respecting the time limit, and I respectfully remind future speakers of the need to conclude their remarks within five minutes. If necessary, after the light begins to flash, I will use the gavel to stake the time.

I give the floor to the representative of Germany.

Mr. Braun (Germany): To begin, let me also thank Special Representative Yamamoto for his comprehensive briefing, and the representatives of Afghanistan who are present here at the table.

Germany aligns itself with the statement to be delivered later on behalf of the European Union.

In his report (S/2017/189), the Secretary-General highlights some encouraging political developments. Germany welcomes the peace agreement with

Hezb-i-Islami and the first steps taken in its implementation. Successful implementation will be crucial in convincing other militant groups that lasting peace is possible in Afghanistan. The precondition, of course, is that they be willing to pursue their objectives through political means, cut ties to international terrorism and respect the universal human rights enshrined in the Afghan Constitution. I would like to commend the National Unity Government for keeping its doors open to peace negotiations with the Taliban. A comprehensive peace and reconciliation process remains the only way to long-term stability in Afghanistan and the region.

Furthermore, like you, Mr. President, we are encouraged by the progress made in electoral reform, and particularly the nomination of a Chief Electoral Officer on 1 March. Afghanistan now has the necessary institutions in place to hold parliamentary and district council elections. Next, a clear and realistic timetable needs to be established for the remaining electoral reforms and for credible, fair, equal and free elections.

The fragile security situation remains the main challenge in Afghanistan. As the Secretary-General notes in his report, the number of armed clashes rose by 5 per cent, the number of civilian casualties continued to rise and the number of child casualties increased by 24 per cent. This is far too much. While the vast majority of those casualties are caused by non-State actors, the Government can do more to protect, in particularly children.

As the Secretary-General also reports, the targeting of health services and health-care workers also continued. Just two days ago, we witnessed the horrible attack on a military hospital in Kabul. On this occasion, we offer our heartfelt condolences to the Afghan people. Sadly, this tragedy has served to underline once more the findings of a report entitled *Every Clinic is Now on the Frontline*, presented by the non-governmental organization Watchlist at an event that Germany co-hosted on 6 March in New York. Children suffer in particular from a lack of access to medical treatment. Germany will continue to raise awareness about the suffering of this most vulnerable group of victims in its capacity as Chair of the local Group of Friends of Children and Armed Conflict.

As reported, 1.5 million Afghan individuals were displaced internally or returned to Afghanistan from neighbouring countries in 2016. The Government of Afghanistan will require substantial help from the international community to deal with that situation. Germany remains committed to supporting the Afghan Government's efforts towards a sustainable reintegration of the returning refugees and internally displaced persons.

We are currently finalizing financial assistance agreements with the International Committee of the Red Cross, the World Food Programme, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the International Organization for Migration, and we encourage all Member States to join us in this endeavour. At the same time, we call upon all parties to ensure that the return of refugees is conducted in a dignified manner and takes into account the absorption capacity of Afghanistan.

Let me conclude by reiterating Germany's full support for the continued important role played by the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) and United Nations agencies working in Afghanistan. As co-Chair of the International Contact Group for Afghanistan, Germany especially commends UNAMA's efforts to strengthen cohesion among international and regional stakeholders for promoting peace in Afghanistan. It is very important, therefore, to renew the UNAMA mandate without further delay. We welcome the strategic review of the Mission, which the Security Council intends to request. The review should be conducted in the spirit of optimizing ongoing activities and strengthening the Mission even further.

Germany remains committed to supporting Afghanistan in close cooperation with the Afghan Government and our international partners.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Pakistan.

Mr. Munir (Pakistan): We also thank the Secretary-General for his report (S/2017/189), and Special Representative of the Secretary-General Yamamoto and Ms. Samar for their briefings this morning.

We reject the baseless allegations made against us by Afghanistan's representative this morning. His Government would do better to deal with its vast challenges than to externalize internal problems. The Government of Afghanistan [NOTE: speaker said "Pakistan" but appears to have meant "Afghanistan" has consumed hundreds of billions of dollars of international assistance, and what it has to show for it is reflected

in the Secretary-General's report. The report observes that there has been no significant improvement in the political, security or economic situation in Afghanistan; attacks by insurgent groups have intensified; economic opportunity remains absent; the reconciliation process has stalled; and the confluence of these factors has magnified the suffering of the people of Afghanistan and threatens regional peace and security. It is indeed threatening the peace and security of my own country.

Shifting the blame to my country will not help the Afghan Government shroud its own failures. It is Afghanistan that has failed to end its wars and internal strife and, as a result, has undermined the security of the entire region. This forum should not be misused for gratuitous sermons; it should be utilized for problem-solving and finding solutions. Peace in Afghanistan is in Pakistan's own vital interest. It is one of my Government's top priorities, but we wonder if this aspiration is shared by some of our regional partners.

Pakistan has paid a staggering human and financial cost for the conflict in Afghanistan, yet the resilience of our proud people and the remarkable success of our military and law-enforcement measures have successfully broken the back of terrorist outfits. It was only possible due to indiscriminate targeting of all terrorist groups. But instead of cooperation and appreciation and applying a similar squeeze on its side of the border, we have heard complaints that our strong action was pushing terrorists into Afghanistan. The fact is that terrorists found safe haven in Aghanistan because of conducive conditions and weak border management. But instead of blaming Afghanistan, Pakistan invited Afghanistan time and again to talk about border management. We proposed a number of border standard operating procedures two years ago. They are still awaiting finalization.

Afghanistan's only response thus far has been sheer indifference and in some cases facilitation of the continued use of Afghan territory for launching attacks in Pakistan, killing and maming hundreds of innocent civilians, including women and children. Yet we prefered restraint over escalation, cooperation over confrontation and dialogue over conflict. And we have been exercising maximum restraint in the face of provocations by terrorists from across the Pakistan border. We were forced to close our border temporarily to secure our territory from the terrorists who reorganized in Afghanistan and launched terrorism against us. Yet, on purely humanitarian grounds, we reopened the border temporarily, risking our own security to alleviate the sufferings of the Afghan people.

There are multiple factors, both military and non-military, that have contributed to the existing stalemate in Afghanistan. Singling out Pakistan and pinning the blame on it for everything that goes wrong in Afghanistan is neither fair nor accurate. Pakistan has consistently called for a negotiated settlement in Afghanistan, but such a settlement remains the responsibility of the parties to the conflict. There has been strong international consensus supporting this solution. We engaged sincerely in the Quadrilateral Coordination Group, which as a mechanism can still be utilized, but we should remembered who sabotaged this process not once but twice. Therefore, if one wants to blame someone for not being sincere, it is definitely not us.

Pakistan remains fully committed to voluntary repatriation of Afghan refugees. Today, as countries close their borders to refugees, the international community, and in particular Afghanistan itself, should be able to fathom the depths of our generosity in hosting more than 3 million Afghan refugees for almost 40 years.

Last week in Islamabad, Pakistan hosted the thirteenth Summit of the Economic Cooperation Organization in a reiteration of our commitment to a peaceful neighbourhood. In Islamabad we jointly recommitted to transforming the region into a zone of peace and collective prosperity, and to facing regional challenges, including terrorism and drug-trafficking, together. One Belt, One Road is an example of other such initiatives that can have positive effects on promoting development and prosperity, and therefore peace, in the region. Pakistan remains committed to those ideals, and we hope that our partners will share in them with the same zeal. We can make the region a centre of peace, progress and prosperity, but we can only do it together.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Turkey.

Mr. Begeç (Turkey): We thank the Secretary-General for his comprehensive report (S/2016/189), Special Representative Yamamoto for his briefing and Ambassador Saikal and Ms. Samar for their statements.

At the outset, I would like to express in the strongest possible terms our condemnation of the heinous attack

that targeted a hospital in Kabul earlier this week, which claimed many innocent lives and maimed many others. We offer our condolences to the brotherly Government and the people of Afghanistan and wish the wounded a speedy recovery. We would also like to reiterate our heartfelt condolences to the Ambassador of the United Arab Emirates to Kabul on the deaths of five of his compatriots and fellow diplomats, who lost their lives as a consequence of the terrorist attack perpetrated in Kandahar in January. I would once again like to emphasize that Turkey will continue its support to the Government of Afghanistan in its fight against terrorism and its efforts to bring peace and stability to the country.

I would like to express our appreciation to the Secretary-General for his comprehensive report, which highlights the achievements and provides guidelines for the future efforts and responsibilities of both Afghanistan and the international community. We commend the role played by the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) in standing with the Afghan people and coordinating international stakeholders' efforts there, and we will continue to support those activities and efforts. In that understanding, we look forward to the Security Council's upcoming adoption of a draft resolution renewing UNAMA's mandate.

The achievements of the past 15 years in Afghanistan must be sustained and enhanced. The international community's continued support during the transformation decade is therefore extremely important. We were pleased to see the international community reiterate its support to Afghanistan at the Warsaw Summit and the Brussels Conference, and that it is keeping up with its commitments to Afghanistan. Turkey has maintained its previous level of development contributions and has pledged another $150 million for the years from 2018 to 2020. We are also providing $60 million to help sustain the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces for the same period, in line with the NATO Warsaw Summit decisions. We will continue to support the Afghan Government's security and development efforts both bilaterally and on multilateral platforms. In that context, we will continue the support we give through the NATO Resolute Support Mission and through our training of Afghan women police officers in Turkey.

Because the National Unity Government symbolizes Afghan unity, we consider its functions important. The international community should continue to support it and encourage its components to work in harmony with one another.

As the report of the Secretary-General reflects, the deteriorating security situation in Afghanistan is a source of serious concern. We applaud the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces for their determined fight against terrorism. The presence of Da'esh on Afghan soil, as mentioned in the report, is another source of grave concern and another reason why we must continue to support Afghanistan. Lasting peace in the country can be achieved only through a successful conclusion to the national peace and reconciliation process. We hope that the agreement between the Government and Hizb-i-Islami will serve as a model for others. We will maintain our support to the Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace efforts.

Last but not least, we believe that enhancing the dialogue among the countries of the region is particularly important. In that regard, Turkey will continue its contributions to Afghanistan within the multilateral platforms, including through the Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the Netherlands.

Mrs. Gregoire-Van-Haaren (Netherlands): I thank you for this opportunity to speak in this debate on behalf of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, Mr. President.

The Kingdom of the Netherlands aligns itself with the statement to be delivered by the observer of the European Union.

I would like to thank the Secretary-General for his detailed and thorough report (S/2017/189). I would also like to thank Special Representative Yamamoto and Ms. Sima Samar for their briefings.

Today I will focus on three issues — reconciliation and regional cooperation, the security and humanitarian situation, and the role of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA).

Reconciliation is key to achieving a truly stable Afghanistan and, to that end, the countries of the region have a critical and positive role to play in support of Afghanistan. A regional approach is crucial to achieving structural security and stability, and requires all partners to be genuinely engaged and working together. However, the peace process should be Afghan-led and

Afghan-owned. Moreover, the meaningful participation of women in any peace process remains essential to achieving durable and inclusive peace. President Ghani has stated that peace talks are a clear objective for the Afghan Government. The Kingdom of the Netherlands welcomes the peace deal that has been reached between the Government and Hizb-i-Islami and considers it to be an important step in the reconciliation process. We hope for its smooth implementation so that the deal can function as an encouragement to other insurgency groups, such as the Taliban, to abandon violence and engage seriously in peace talks.

In the past few months, unfortunately, the armed clashes between Afghan security forces and the Taliban have continued. Only two days ago, an attack in Kabul for which local affiliates of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant claimed responsibility left more than 120 people killed or injured, and I would like to express my condolences to Ambassador Saikal in that regard. While we commend the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces (ANDSF) for their continued efforts to counter the Taliban and other insurgents, international support remains necessary. The international community, including the Kingdom of the Netherlands, has supported the ANDSF for more than a decade now, and we continue to do so through our contribution to the Resolute Support Mission.

The Kingdom of the Netherlands is particularly concerned about children's disproportionate suffering in the deteriorating security situation, as well as about the steep rise in the numbers of internally displaced persons (IDPs). Afghanistan's limited capacity to absorb the vast increase in IDPs and returnees has the potential to lead to growing numbers with no prospects of steady jobs or incomes and at risk of joining insurgency groups. In response to last year's United Nations flash appeal, the Netherlands contributed €4.5 million to provide humanitarian assistance to the most vulnerable groups in Afghanistan.

The Kingdom of the Netherlands commends UNAMA for its role in supporting the Afghan Government in fulfilling its commitments in the area of reform, and we therefore support the continuation of its mandate. We would particularly like to emphasize our appreciation for its coordinating efforts among international partners, as well as the thorough UNAMA human rights reports. As Ms. Samar just underlined, while much progress has been made in recent years, human rights, including women's rights, continue to be a matter for significant concern in Afghanistan, and we applaud United Nations efforts to work with the Afghan Government and civil society in enhancing the position of women there. We would like to emphasize our appreciation for the broad United Nations presence throughout the country and to stress how important we believe it is to ensure that UNAMA continues to operate throughout Afghanistan rather than retreating to Kabul alone. A presence in the field is crucial to the Mission's success.

The Kingdom of the Netherlands has been a long-term partner of Afghanistan and has contributed significant aid to it in the areas of peace, justice and development. At the Brussels Conference on 5 October, our Minister for Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation pledged €230 million to continue our support for Afghanistan's reconstruction. In that spirit of partnership, the Kingdom of the Netherlands remains committed to supporting Afghanistan throughout the transformation decade, a decade of increasing Afghan ownership and leadership.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of India.

Mr. Akbaruddin (India): I would like to thank you, Mr. President, for organizing today's debate on the situation in Afghanistan. We also appreciate the insightful and frank briefings by Special Representative Yamamoto and Ms. Sima Samar, which have added to our understanding of the current circumstances.

The unimpeded and increasingly brutal terrorist attacks, the territorial gains by terrorist groups with support from outside Afghanistan and the emerging grave humanitarian crises are all portents of dreadful times. The recent terrorist attack on Afghanistan's largest hospital in Kabul poignantly depicts the very complexity of the problems faced by Afghans as a people, in the most graphic manner. Afghanistan, a wounded nation reeling with multiple injuries — in dire need of healing and at its most vulnerable — was attacked in the most gruesome manner by disguised attackers who target caregivers.

In the past few months, terrorism in Afghanistan has grown enormously in intensity, brutality and scope. Terrorist groups have been successful in their efforts to capture and hold territory. The Taliban has tried to expand its influence to territories in the north and northeast, and to the southwest where it has traditionally

not been so strong. The nexus between terrorist networks and criminal groups has further strengthened.

We salute the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces, who are countering the forces of terrorism and extremism with courage and resilience. India remains committed to standing with Afghanistan and supporting and strengthening its capabilities to fight terrorism and violence. Even as the international community pours in resources and efforts to support that wounded nation, steadfast efforts to ensure that the support can be absorbed and utilized by Afghanistan are crucial. In that regard, it is our first and foremost duty to ensure that the resurgent forces of terrorism and extremism do not find sanctuaries or safe havens of any shape or form. Experience shows that situations in which foreign assistance is available to insurgents tend to fester and take a greater toll. We also must not differentiate between good and bad terrorists or play one group against the other. The Taliban, the Haqqani network, Al-Qaida, Da'esh, Lashkar-e-Tayyiba, Jaish-e-Mohammed and others of their ilk are all terror organizations — many of them proscribed by the United Nations. They should be treated as such and their activities must be universally opposed.

It is obvious that the political process that the United Nations started and the sanctions regimes that the Council had split have not quite worked. The fact that the Council has not taken action against the Taliban leaders, as it had vowed in resolution 1988 (2011), is now well documented. It took the subsidiary body of the Council four months to confirm the death of the Taliban's former leader. Seven months later, we still await the decision of the Council's same subsidiary body regarding the freezing of that slain terrorist's accounts.

Even as the democratically elected Government of Afghanistan battles against terror, it is being saddled with mounting problems that are not of its making. We are seeing a paradoxical phenomenon of the return of almost a million Afghans to their homeland, many involuntarily, in the most difficult security and economic situation the country has witnessed. As if all this were not enough, the landlocked country's access to the high seas is becoming an issue of contention.

The collective humanitarian impact of all this is staggering, as outlined in the Secretary-General's report (S/2017/189) and by the briefers today. Has the trend of reversing of the gains of the international community and Afghan people in the last decades perhaps now started? Can all of us, who have invested so much in support of the Afghan people, remain watching on the sidelines? Can we simply look on as territories are captured by terrorists, people are killed or forced, under threat, to go back to a situation that is the same or worse than the one they fled? Here and now, it is imperative that we take decisive action. We must not forget the implications the world faced in 2001 for its lack of action. History never forgives those who forget it.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Mr. Khoshroo (Islamic Republic of Iran): I would like to express my appreciation to the United Kingdom for having organized this debate and to the Ambassador of Afghanistan for his statement, as well as to Mr. Yamamoto and Ms. Samar.

I express our deepest sympathies and condolences to the people and Government of Afghanistan over the two most recent terrorist attacks on 1 and 8 March, carried out by the Taliban and Da'esh, respectively.

According to the latest Secretary-General report (S/2017/189), the overall security situation continued to worsen throughout 2016 and into 2017 with 23,700 security incidents — an increase of nearly 5 per cent compared to 2015 and the highest number ever recorded by the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA). At the same time, we note that the number of such incidents in 2015 — an increase of 22 percent over 2014 — was the highest level since the United Nations started recording security incidents. This has been a very disturbing trend since 2001.

Today, the Afghan National Unity Government is at the forefront of the fight against terrorism. The sustained support of the international community is needed more than ever to support the Government in its fight against terrorism and extremism, as well as to address its security, political, economic and development challenges.

In my previous statements, I warned about the emergence of Da'esh and its affiliates in Afghanistan. The terrorist attack on 23 July and the most recent organized terrorist attack on the Kabul hospital last Wednesday, 8 March, are clear indications concerning that emerging security threat for Afghanistan and the region.

Our support for the Afghan National Unity Government is unrelenting; we stand ready to work constructively with the Afghan authorities. We welcome any Government progress towards peace and hope that an Afghan-owned and -led peace process brings about lasting and comprehensive peace in the country and the region. Iran is indeed very eager to see a peaceful and prosperous Afghanistan as its neighbour, since security in Afghanistan directly and indirectly affects security at our borders and in the region.

Strengthening our regional cooperation with Afghanistan is a priority and a major pathway to consolidating peace and economic development and stability in the region. The trilateral Chabahar agreement between Iran, India and Afghanistan on the development of the Chabahar port, which gives Afghanistan access to world markets through the open seas, and the Khaf-Herat railway are two major transit projects under way. Those projects have the capacity to change the regional economic prospects of Afghanistan. We invite all interested regional actors to consider participating in them.

For the past 37 years, Iran hosted no less than 3 million Afghan nationals at any given point. They have access to most of the subsidized services available to Iranian nationals, including basic commodities, public transportation, public health and public education. We continue to provide them with social services and educate nearly 400,000 undocumented Afghan students with minimum burden-sharing assistance from the international community.

Repatriation of Afghans from Iran remains steady but continues to represent the lowest recorded returnee rate since the establishment of the voluntary return programme in 2002. We welcome all efforts aimed at helping to overcome the main reintegration challenges faced by returnees and to formulate a comprehensive voluntary repatriation and reintegration strategy. Success in voluntary repatriation depends first and foremost on providing for the basic needs of repatriated refugees in Afghanistan, which underscores the need for greater international support. A stronger, coordinated approach between the Government, donors and the United Nations, and an overall strategy for addressing the combined needs of displaced persons and returnees are crucial in order to make the repatriation of Afghan refugees more successful.

In conclusion, we support UNAMA as well as United Nations agencies in their efforts to provide development and reconstruction assistance to Afghanistan through a genuine commitment by the United Nations to a sustained partnership with Afghanistan, as set forth in the final report of the Tripartite Review Commission on the United Nations in Afghanistan.

Let me conclude by reaffirming the resolve of the people and the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran to continue their support for the fraternal people and Government of Afghanistan as they move through this difficult period of their history towards a stable, safe and prosperous Afghanistan, and on the eve of their New Year, I wish them a happy Nowruz.

The President: I now give the floor to Mr. João Pedro Vale de Almeida, Head of the Delegation of the European Union to the United Nations.

Mr. Vale de Almeida: I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union (EU) and its 28 member States.

The candidate countries Turkey, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Albania, the country of the Stabilization and Association Process and potential candidate Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova and Armenia, align themselves with this statement.

Due to time constraints, I shall read out a slightly shorter version of my statement. The full version, as agreed, has been distributed in the Chamber.

I would like to thank the Secretary-General for his comprehensive report (S/2017/189). I thank also the Special Representative and Ms. Samar for their briefings today.

First, I wish to convey the condolences of the European Union to the Afghan authorities and the Afghan people in connection with the tragic attack on a military hospital that took place a few days ago in Kabul.

I should like to start by reiterating our full support for the important role played by the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) and all the United Nations agencies in supporting the Afghan people and in coordinating the international community's assistance.

The Warsaw conference held in July and the Brussels conference on Afghanistan of October 2016 made clear the strong international commitment to Afghanistan. At the Brussels conference, the international community sent a clear signal in support of a process towards peace, security and stability.

All international security, political, economic, development and regional efforts should now be aligned to further such a political process. Terrorism and violent extremism are fundamental threats to all State actors, just as terrorism and the use of violence undermine regional peace and stability.

The EU remains fully committed to supporting an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace process that includes all Afghan citizens and their legitimate interests and preserves Afghanistan's unity, sovereignty and territorial integrity as well as equal rights for all Afghans under the Constitution of Afghanistan.

After the signing of the Hizb-i Islami peace agreement, for which the parties deserve credit, it will now be important to implement it and open the way for future peace agreements. In this regard, we welcome the Security Council's decision to de-list Hizb-i Islami's leader, Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, as an important step towards the full implementation of the peace agreement. The EU is ready to support further the implementation of this agreement.

We welcome the undeterred willingness of the Afghan Government to engage in a political process with the Taliban and other Afghan groups opposing the Kabul Government to reach a lasting political settlement. We welcome all initiatives to create an environment conducive to such a process and call on all parties to engage so as to devise constructive solutions.

We welcome the further work that has been done by the Afghan Government since the Brussels conference to advance the implementation of its commitments and the progress made in anti-corruption, election preparation, revenue collection and budget execution as an example that must now followed by further, tangible results in the implementation of the reform agenda. The EU will remain attentive to the next steps.

I would like to highlight the importance of and the need for continued focus on ways and means of empowering Afghan women to build a stable and prosperous Afghanistan, as well as reinforcing the political and human rights of Afghan women and the realization of the full enjoyment of those rights in everyday life.

The EU welcomes the priority that the Afghan Government places on fighting corruption, which remains a major obstacle to development and stability, and stresses the need to further strengthen efforts to tackle corruption. The EU further welcomes the important results already achieved and looks forward to further follow-up.

We also support the reform of the security sector, with a focus on making advances in civilian policing in Afghanistan, building on the achievements of the European Union Police Mission in Afghanistan. The establishment of the new EU Special Representative police advisory team will contribute to the implementation of the new Afghanistan security-sector reform plan.

At the Brussels Conference, the international community welcomed the Afghan National Peace and Development Framework and its ambitious development vision.

The EU and its member States welcome the adoption of the new election law and the appointment of the new commissioners to the electoral management bodies. These must now work in a professional and transparent manner to rebuild public confidence in the electoral processes. While technical aspects of the elections play an important role, the political will of Afghan stakeholders and a strong and cohesive leadership are necessary to deliver credible elections. The EU supports an early engagement with the electoral-management bodies and UNAMA's coordinating role. Any assistance must be forward-looking, leading to the implementation of meaningful electoral reforms as well as to the sustainable development of electoral institutions and improved electoral processes.

On 18 February, the signing between the EU and the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan of their first contractual relationship, the Cooperation Agreement on Partnership and Development, sent a strong political signal of the EU's enduring support for the country through the transformation decade and beyond. The Agreement will also provide the basis for developing a mutually beneficial relationship in an increasing range of areas such as the rule of law, health, rural development, education, science and technology, as well as actions to combat corruption, money laundering, the

financing of terrorism, organized crime and narcotics. It also foresees cooperation on migration.

On behalf of the European Union and its member States, I would like to reiterate that joint State-building and development efforts in Afghanistan need to build on reinforced regional cooperation. Regional cooperation remains key to lasting peace and stability in Afghanistan and the region. Threats of terrorism affecting all countries of the region can be confronted only with increased security cooperation. In the same vein, it is indispensable for sustainable development. In this regard, the EU strongly supports regional forums such as the Heart of Asia or the Regional Economic Cooperation Conference on Afghanistan to continue to be used to facilitate cooperation among all regional actors.

To conclude, the EU and Afghanistan continue with the implementation of the EU-Afghanistan joint way forward agreement on migration issues and the bilateral member States' memorandums of understanding. In this process, the European Union puts strong emphasis on ensuring sustainable reintegration and providing substantial support to the Afghan Government to facilitate return and reintegration.

The EU has also continued its efforts to promote a regional approach and intends to focus on sustainable reintegration, local development, social cohesion in host communities and durable solutions to protracted displacement. UNAMA has played an important role in coordinating the international efforts to that end. We would encourage UNAMA to continue that work and the dialogue with the Afghan Government on the inclusion of internally displaced persons and returnees. The EU aims to develop a comprehensive EU response to bridge the humanitarian-development nexus and promote durable solutions to the challenges posed by the protracted nature of that crisis.

UNAMA's report on civilian casualties in Afghanistan documents a record number of civilian casualties in 2016, the majority of which were due to insurgent attacks. We call on all parties to do their utmost to protect the civilian population, especially Afghan women and children. We also need to continue to protect the vital role of humanitarian agencies and respect their impartiality and humanitarian space in addressing the most urgent needs of the most vulnerable.

It is important that the international community remains strongly committed to supporting Afghanistan towards long-term progress and stability. The EU continues to consider UNAMA to be a key partner in achieving peace and stability in Afghanistan. UNAMA has an invaluable role in ensuring the broadest possible international support for an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned process. For that reason, we support the renewal of UNAMA's mandate, as proposed by the Secretary-General in his most recent report.

The President: I give the floor to the representative of Australia.

Ms. Wilson (Australia): Like others before me, I would like to express Australia's condemnation and condolences following the heinous and cowardly terrorist attack that took place in Kabul on 8 March. We extend our condolences to the families of the victims and the Government of Afghanistan.

Australia thanks the Secretary-General for his most recent report (S/2017/189). Despite declines in a number of indicators in the report, Australia believes that 2017 could be a year of substantive progress in Afghanistan if the successes of Warsaw and Brussels are able to be capitalized on. The performance indicators have been agreed and Afghanistan has the sophisticated plans and funding in place to achieve them.

Challenges remain, including ongoing concerns about corruption, and access to Government services fuelled by insecurity and political instability. To that end, we welcome the Afghan Government's commitment to countering corruption and to reaching out to opinion leaders within and beyond the Government. We encourage the Afghan Government to recall its social contract with the Afghan people and continue progress towards the holding of elections in the coming year.

A stable Afghanistan remains central to stability in the region. Violent extremism has never respected national boundaries and we encourage all countries in the region to continue building on the Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process by engaging in dialogue and cooperation to advance peace and stability. Australia remains committed to helping the Afghan security services rise to the challenge presented by the insurgency, and at Warsaw we extended our deployment of approximately 270 personnel to the NATO Resolute Support Mission. We remain in the top five donors contributing to the sustainment of Afghan forces.

We were deeply distressed to see civilian casualties rose by 3 per cent last year, to the highest level recorded

since 2009. Australia calls on all parties of the conflict to enact measures that protect the vulnerable, especially women and children. Long-term stability will require a successful Afghan-owned and -led peace process. We are encouraged by progress made towards implementing the agreement with Hezb-i-Islami in 2016. We urge the Afghan Government to continue engaging with empowered negotiators, including women, to bring an end to the insurgency.

Insecurity is fuelling a humanitarian crisis, with a record level of conflict-induced displacements and unprecedented numbers of people returning from Pakistan and Iran in 2016. Australia's humanitarian assistance to Afghanistan — of almost $19 million last year — helped provide support that included critical shelter, food and health care to over 6.9 million Afghan people.

Australia remains committed to working with Afghanistan to address its development challenges. We have provided community-based education classes to more than 19,000 children since 2001. More than 70 per cent of the children were girls. Such classes are just a small part of our development programme in Afghanistan, and at the Brussels Conference Australia pledged to maintain current levels of aid funding through to 2020.

In conclusion, Australia sees a real opportunity for progress in Afghanistan this year. We call on the Afghan Government to build on the successes of 2016. We urge continued international cooperation to improve country and regional stability. We congratulate the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan for its important contribution. On his retirement, we would like to acknowledge the efforts of the United Nations Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator, Mr. Mark Bowden, who has made a great contribution to Afghanistan.

The President: I give the floor to the representative of Belgium.

Mr. Buffin (Belgium) (*spoke in French*): Belgium thanks the Secretary-General for his quarterly report (S/2017/189) on the situation in Afghanistan. I also thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Tadamichi Yamamoto, for his clear and enlightening briefing.

Belgium fully aligns itself with the statement delivered on behalf of the European Union.

First and foremost, on behalf of my country, I would like to strongly condemn the reprehensible attack on the military hospital in Kabul. Targeting a hospital is a particularly vile, cowardly and barbaric act. Our condolences and sympathy go to the families of the victims and to the people of Afghanistan. Belgium, along with the international community, will continue to support Afghanistan in the fight against such acts of terror.

Regrettably, the report of the Secretary-General also reminds us that civilians continue to pay a very high price in the conflict. The increase in the number of children killed or injured is particularly unbearable. We support the Secretary-General's call for an end to attacks on civilians and to ensure that impunity does not triumph and that schools, hospitals, teachers and health workers are no longer targeted.

Paradoxically, despite those serious security problems, peace in Afghanistan is not a pipe dream. First, the current military impasse demonstrates that a military solution to the conflict simply does not exist. Secondly, the Afghan population, as a whole, exhausted by so many years of war, longs for stability and development. Finally, the restoration of peace will benefit both Afghans and their neighbours. I would like to mention four points that seem key to giving peace every chance to be restored.

First, it is important for the National Unity Government to continue to make every effort to gain the trust of the Afghan people through the implementation of policies aimed at ensuring the security of the population, eradicating corruption and impunity, promoting human rights — in particular those of women — and addressing shortcomings in the area of justice and good governance.

Secondly, it is important that the process of reconciliation and reconciliation encompass all components of Afghan society, including those that are currently opposed to the National Unity Government. Failing that, peace will remain elusive. In other words, we must ensure that the process is taken in hand and run by Afghans themselves. Women also have a crucial role to play in achieving lasting peace. They must be fully involved in the peace and reconciliation process.

Thirdly, the role of regional partners in the success of the peace and reconciliation process must be emphasized. In that regard, Belgium calls on all regional actors to use their influence to promote the resumption of peace talks and an end to the fighting, while leaving Afghans to take charge of their own destiny and complete the process of peace and reconciliation on their own.

Finally, economic development is another priority, as it will make the country less dependent on international aid, on the one hand, and illegal trade, on the other. The ongoing conflict profoundly affects the opportunities for growth; resources allotted to war are not used for development purposes.

However, deep economic reforms are also needed to create an environment conducive to the return of investment and the reappropriation of their future by the Afghans. The commitments made by the Afghan authorities at the Brussels conference with respect to their reform programme show that they are determined to do so. We encourage them to move forward in order to create the conditions to give the younger generations of Afghans, who are increasingly educated and harbour legitimate aspirations, the prospect of a better future in their own country.

Allow me to conclude by welcoming the action of United Nations personnel in Afghanistan. They do outstanding work under particularly difficult conditions. The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) illustrates the international community's resolve to partner with the Afghans. With the renewal of the UNAMA mandate in the near future, the United Nations will once again reiterate its commitment to Afghanistan and its people.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Spain.

Mr. González de Linares Palou (Spain) (*spoke in Spanish*): I would like to begin my statement by firmly condemning and offering the heartfelt condolences of Spain for the terrible attack that took place two days ago against the Sardar Daud Khan hospital in Kabul. We reiterate our full solidarity with Afghanistan in its fight against terrorism.

I also recall the universal obligation to respect the principles and norms of international humanitarian law and the protection of civilians in situations of conflict, in particular the mandate of resolution 2286 (2016) on the obligation to safeguard, always and without exception in situations of armed conflict, the integrity of health personnel and humanitarian personnel dedicated exclusively to medical missions, as well as their means of transport and equipment, hospitals and other health facilities.

I thank the Special Representative Yamamoto and Ms. Sima Samar for their briefings, the Permanent Representative of Afghanistan for his statement.

I fully endorse the statement delivered by the Head of the Delegation of the European Union.

We particularly welcome the presence here today of Ms. Samar, in her capacity as Chairperson of the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission. We admire her personal journey as a committed and active advocate for the rights of women and girls in Afghanistan, and we highly value her very important role and the work of the institution she chairs so ably. The promotion and protection of human rights are inseparable from the maintenance of peace and the achievement of social progress in every society. Afghanistan is no exception.

Support for Afghanistan and the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) has been one of Spain's priorities during our recently conclude two years as a non-permanent member of the Council. We are convinced that the Council must maintain its traditional spirit of commitment and consensus on this issue. Such consensual support for UNAMA and the authorities and people of Afghanistan is essential to help the Afghans, who are the true owners of their future, to overcome the conflict and advance along the path of progress and reconciliation. Spain encourages them to continue along this line.

It is only necessary and fair to acknowledge the remarkable progress made by Afghanistan, such as in its anti-corruption actions and policies for the promotion and protection of women's rights, whose implementation and dissemination still require strong and sustained efforts. We must nonetheless recognize, as does the Secretary-General's report (S/2017/189), that security situation remains grave and has even suffered setbacks last year and early in this. Spain and the international community as a whole support the Government and the Afghan people in their efforts in the face of these grave challenges.

The unity of all political actors around these efforts is essential to the success of those efforts.In that regard, the electoral process whose foundations are currently being laid will be decisive. We therefore call on all political and social actors to demonstrate their commitment to democracy and progress and to rise to the vision that all Afghans expect and deserve.

But together with the consolidation of a democratic system of governance, Afghanistan needs peace and reconciliation in an increasingly more urgent way. All members of the international community have important contributions to make in that regard, but the input of the countries of the region is irreplaceable and essential. That is why we appeal to all countries neighbours and friends of Afghanistan to redouble their commitment to the stability of the country and to work for reconciliation with renewed energy and decision.

The statistics concerning the terrible effects of conflict civilians, as contained in the Secretary-General's report, must make us all lead to reflect, encourage us to maintain our solidarity, renew our determination to support Afghanistan's efforts and, above all and apart from other considerations, resolve us to spare no effort in favour of peace, reconciliation, stability and progress for Afghanistan and the Afghans.

The President: I give the floor to the representative of Canada.

Mr. Blanchard (Canada) (*spoke in French*): I thank you, Sir, for this opportunity to address the Security Council. Canada would like to thank the Special Representative of the Secretary General, Mr. Yamamoto, for his insightful briefing.

I would also like to welcome Ms. Sima Samar, Chair of the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission. Canada is a long-standing believer in the work of the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission and supports its programmes.

I take this opportunity to extend our sincerest condolences to the people of Afghanistan, and especially to the families and friends of the victims of the horrible attack on a Kabul hospital. This is another unfortunate reminder of the difficult security situation in the country.

Canada fully supports an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace and reconciliation process and acknowledges the efforts made to date by the Government of Afghanistan. The continuity of the National Unity Government and its reform agenda are fundamental to peace, stability and progress in Afghanistan. Canada commends the progress that has been made on electoral reform and anti-corruption efforts, and supports continued reform. Canada is also pleased that parliamentary and district council elections are scheduled to be held in 2018.

(*spoke in English*)

Secondly, Canada is deeply concerned over the continuing deterioration of security in Afghanistan, with higher civilian and aid worker causalities reported in early 2017 than for the same time frame in 2016. We are dismayed by the toll on civilians. Their displacement, increased vulnerability and losses are unacceptable. In particular, we are concerned about the impact of instability and insecurity on women and children. We echo the statement issued by the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan that all parties to the conflict need to take urgent steps to halt the killing and maiming of civilians. We look to Afghanistan's neighbours to continue to work with the Government of Afghanistan to better coordinate and manage the return of Afghan refugees in order to support increased regional stability and decreased violence within the country.

Thirdly, Canada would like to commend the Afghanistan Government for launching in December its strategy and action plan for the elimination of violence against women for the period 2016-2020. Last year, President Ghani inaugurated a dedicated fund to sponsor emergency services for women survivors of life-threatening acts of violence, and Canada encourages the Afghan Government to make this fund and the implementation of the law on ending violence against women a priority.

Canada's programming supports women's inclusion and empowerment through Afghanistan's development, as well as a wide variety of efforts to address violence against women. Examples include our assistance in implementing the law on the elimination of violence against women; delivering services for survivors of gender-based violence; and providing education, awareness-raising and capacity-building on women's rights and gender-based violence. Canada's programming is also supporting women to take on decision-making roles in their households and communities, and to build livelihood skills and capacities for economically marginalized women.

If peace, security and development are to take root in Afghanistan, women must join men at the centre of decision-making at all levels of Afghan politics, society and the economy. Canada stands with the Afghan people, especially Afghan women and girls, as they strive for a more secure, prosperous and peaceful future.

The President: I thank our briefers and all participants for their contributions to an interesting debate. I look forward to returning to the issue of Afghanistan with a vote on the renewal of the mandate of United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan next week.

The meeting rose at 1.10 p.m.